







**EGO 9**

# MY BOOKS



## *Novels*

RESPONSIBILITY  
BLESSED ARE THE RICH  
GEMEL IN LONDON

## *Belles-lettres*

L. OF C. (LINES OF COMMUNICATION)  
FANTASIES AND IMPROMPTUS  
WHITE HORSE AND RED LION  
ON AN ENGLISH SCREEN  
AGATE'S FOLLY  
THE COMMON TOUCH  
KINGDOMS FOR HORSES  
BAD MANNERS  
EXPRESS AND ADMIRABLE  
THURSDAYS AND FRIDAYS  
NOBLESSE OBLIGE  
AROUND CINEMAS  
THUS TO REVISIT . . .

## *Essays of the Theatre*

BUZZ, BUZZ !  
ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS  
AT HALF-PAST EIGHT  
THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE  
THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE  
THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE  
THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE  
A SHORT VIEW OF THE ENGLISH STAGE  
PLAYGOING  
THEIR HOUR UPON THE STAGE  
MY THEATRE TALKS  
FIRST NIGHTS  
MORE FIRST NIGHTS  
THE AMAZING THEATRE  
THESE WERE ACTORS  
BRIEF CHRONICLES  
RED-LETTER NIGHTS  
IMMOMENT TOYS  
THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE  
THOSE WERE THE NIGHTS

## *Anthologies*

THE ENGLISH DRAMATIC CRITICS  
SPEAK FOR ENGLAND  
HERE'S RICHNESS !

## *Biography*

RACHEL

## *Autobiography*

EGO  
EGO 2  
EGO 3  
EGO 4  
EGO 5  
EGO 6  
EGO 7  
EGO 8





*The Author*

*Phot. G. L. S. Anthony*

# EGO 9

**CONCLUDING THE  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
OF  
JAMES AGATE**

**There's sap in't yet.  
*Antony and Cleopatra***



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**IN MEMORIAM  
ISIDORE LEO PAVIA  
OBIIT**

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*Jan. 1* Five New Year cards. One, anonymous, shows an *Tuesday*. opulent maiden, bare as to bosom and feet, "poring upon the brook that babbles by," and reading an elegant tome. Title: "I think it's a novel by Charles Morgan." The second is a hand-coloured drawing from and by Angna Enters entitled "Vienna Provincial." I like to think that this is our old friend Isolda Gänzebrust when young. The third is from Nigel Bruce, still in Hollywood. Fourth is from Donald Wolfit: himself as Lear. Fifth is a nostalgic photograph of Réjane, sent by her son.

*Jan. 2* *Cinderella* at the Adelphi. Buttons, alas! too old. *Wednesday*. One could almost imagine this Cinderella saying to Flrnagan, "O my dear, dear bud, welcome home!" Indeed, one wished she would, and even finish Margery Pinchwife's *accueil*: "Why dost thou look so fropish? Who has nangered thee?" "Nangered?" I can see Bud's face as he repeats this. "What's 'nangered'?"

How poor the modern songs are compared with those of fifty years ago! Vesta Tilley made it seem natural that Robinson Crusoe should exchange those Arctic furs appropriate to Juan Fernandez, or wherever it was, for the West End blue serge suit, double-breasted fancy waistcoat, straw hat, and whangee cane in which to tell the story of Percy and Gladys—Romeo and Juliet of the warehouse and shop—whose romance, embodied by other Percys and Gladyses, gilds with eternal summer the dingy Margate boarding-house. In the 'nineties singers of the tender passion did not drool—remember the lilt and riot of Marie Lloyd's "The Wedding Bells were ringing"?—and the Blues had not yet infected the ether with their megrims. As I write somebody turns the knob of my radio, and I hear an oily, *scented* male voice crooning:

"... like asparagus in season,  
And that is the reason  
You'd be so nice to come home to."

And I think again of Vesta Tilley, and the greater charm, sophistication, and sense of her

"Into a cookshop he goes dashing;  
Who should bring his plate of hash in  
But the girl he had been mashing  
By the sad sea waves."

*Jan. 3* At the Café Royal to-night I met a Bloomsburyite who  
*Thursday.* started babbling about Jean-Paul Sartre and his philosophy of Existentialism. In the course of his babbling he let out that he had never heard of Fred Karno. Whereupon I told him to keep quiet while I jotted down a General Knowledge Paper for a Youth Envisaging a Literary Career. And put Mooncalf through it, with astonishing results. He thought the earth's diameter was 98,000 miles. Thought Lent was the period between Easter and Whitsun. Hadn't heard of Euclid. Couldn't multiply  $a + b$  by  $a + b$ . Had never read a word of Milton, Tennyson, Keats. Couldn't quote any line from Gray's *Elegy*. Couldn't fill in the blanks in "From fairest — we desire increase, That thereby beauty's — might never die." Saw nothing wrong about "The expensive spirit is a waste of shame. . . ." Hadn't opened any book by Dickens or Thackeray. Had never heard of Sayers and Heenan, "W. G.," Fred Archer, John Roberts, Arthur Roberts, Harry Vardon. Didn't know what school Tom Brown went to, or who was its headmaster. Thought Henry VIII had eight wives, but could mention only Lady Jane Grey. Had never heard of the Jameson Raid. Saw nothing wrong with "hidjus," the "woom" of Time, Volterre, Gerter, Walt Whiteman. Thought Grock was a patent medicine. Had no notion which Gilbert and Sullivan character wanted to make the punishment fit the crime. "I hope not!" said Mooncalf. And started to put the case for abolishing punishment in favour of rehabilitation through self-respect. Winding up with: "The trouble with you old men is that you confuse formative principles with factual knowledge. The object of education is to enable the individual to make original contribution to the whole. And you mix this up with spelling!"

*Jan. 4* The following speaks for itself:  
*Friday.*

*Amesbury Lodge  
 George Road  
 Guernsey  
 Channel Isles  
 3rd January*

DEAR MR AGATE,

An austere bound copy of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* came into my possession several months ago in the most gratifying manner possible. You announced that you had a very limited number of copies, and would present them to those members of H.M. Forces who wrote and asked nicely!

From my mud-spattered outpost of Empire in the Fen country I

wrote. When the little volume arrived I wrote again, to say thank you.

Then—well, the attached poem finishes the melancholy tale. The poet, an Australian Air Gunner, shared my love of the absurd Doctor, and often we read extracts by the light of the remote Norfolk moon.

But the poet, like my copy of the book, is gone. He was blown to pieces over Germany during the last few weeks of the war.

He was nineteen years old.

Yours very sincerely,

PENELOPE PHILIP-SMITH

# ON LOSING YOUR COPY

OF

“ DOCTOR JOHNSON ”

Once, while I kissed you,  
 A little yellow book  
 That clever hands had made,  
 And fine-set print  
 Endowed with august character,  
 Tiring of the life it knew  
 (Melancholy without stint),  
 Spent in the shade  
 Of dusty corners—drugged, by chance,  
 By your new, exciting nearness,  
 Rebellious did race  
 Along the ledge, to dance,  
 And topple down, in drunk distress,  
 Into the brook.

Perhaps there *was* a splash !  
 Protesting cry,  
 And clutching of a cardboard throat  
 As the water, rising high,  
 Flowed o’er his well-thumbed coat,  
 A gurgling and pedantic sigh  
 As he sped  
 To a sanded shelf.

But I

Then was kissing you, who, if the stars  
 Had fallen in a shining heap  
 Along the entire, moon-lit wall,  
 Would not have heard them fall yourself !  
 Would not have felt the pebbles start,  
 For you were too close  
 To my head and my heart  
 To see the deep-  
 Shaded doctor looking from his sleep  
 (Peruke a little twisted on his head).

Naiads used his silver-headed cane,  
 Reed-garlanded, for a maypole,  
 On the green river-bed.  
 And, on a well-hosed knee,  
 A pleading little fish-boy  
 Cried for his watch-chain.

R. A. DOWE

*Jan. 5* A young man, twenty-four, Traddles type, calls on me  
*Saturday.* to know whether he is a poet. Not having read his  
 verses, I say confidently No. Says he thinks he may  
 be a better musician. I say, "Play something." And he plays half  
 of the first movement of his first sonata. Not bad. Then something  
 for a film—mixture of Addinsell and Rachmaninoff. Then *Wood*  
*Echoes*, which he thinks is a *mélange* of Delius and Sibelius, and I tell  
 him is Edward German edited by Norman O'Neill. When he has  
 gone I find this on my desk :

And you came to me late,  
 Your cheeks smeared with the wet signatures of Spring,  
 After a little loneliness and silken laughter  
 Alone by night like a tired king.

*Jan. 6* This week's letters :  
*Sunday.*

1.

*Eastbourne*

DEAR MR AGATE,

Do you think you could stand living with a genius for long ?  
 Of course my sister Connie may not be a genius but she acts like  
 one which is worse. She has just written a play and its going to be  
 acted and she says she's going to send it to you for you to judge.  
 If she does please tell her its tripe (it is very probably tripe in  
 any case), then perhaps she won't be so awfull to talk to. She  
 won't let me see her play because she says it isnt fit for little boys.  
 (I'm 15)

In disgust  
 F. RUBBLE

2. Remembering my dear Rebecca's enchanting letter after  
 Brother Mycroft had called her " odious " (*Ego* 2, p. 105), I have no  
 hesitation in including part of the latest from my little Dublin friend,  
 J. E. Jordan :

Browsing in *Ego* 2, my back against the hard library shelves,  
 my chest heaving with joy, I was delighted to see how much your  
 nice Brother Mycroft dislikes that awful Rebecca West. The  
 woman is intolerable. For me her one redeeming quality is her  
 genuine love for you. God knows I'm no Virginia Woolf fan, but  
 I infinitely prefer her " meandering " novels, which you find intoler-  
 able and unreadable, to the gibberings and mouthings of la West. I  
 grunted in satisfaction when I saw in your Jan. 2nd *Tatler* article  
 mention of Théodore de Banville and his foreseeing of the cinema.

I wondered when you were going to use that ; I was amazed that a man of your perspicacity had not noticed the startling common sense of Baring's essay on "Punch and Judy," in which he quotes Théodore. But now you have used it, and I'm glad. Baring's death shocked me. Only Shaw (ninety this year), Wells (eighty this year), Belloc (seventy-six this year), and you (sixty-nine this year) remain of my literary gods. Enough. I'm gibbering in a singularly Rebecca-ish manner.

### 3. From Reginald Moore, Editor of *Modern Reading* :

If you find anything odiously intellectual in this number of *Modern Reading* I promise to eat your page of the *Express*.

A challenge is a challenge, and here is how, on Saturday, I propose to take up this one :

Opening *M.R.* at an article entitled "Henry Goes Honky-Tonk," I find Henry Treece telling me :

1. That the thrill of Boogie Woogie "comes from the adventure of letting the hands 'taste' the white and black in spontaneous rhythmic patterns."
2. That Boogie means "an America of smoke-laden below-stairs dives where a thug talks quietly out of the side of his mouth to a moll in a fur coat, and a third-rate pugilist argues in a Bowery voice with a wild-collared newspaperman whose mind is on selling more and more of the latest kind of cereal so that he can buy a faster car on a new instalment plan and so get an even snappier dame than the one in the corner in the fur coat."
3. That this below-stairs music, this tuneless row, this animal frenzy, this natural expression of garage-hand or coloured cab-washer, "states a proposition, an hypothesis, in terms almost as pure as a Bach fugue, or a Debussy Prelude. . . . That, then, is what Boogie means to me ; it can send me in a way I have never known before. No, not even from a Marlowe rant, or the first thrill of Pieter Breughel."

*Bon appétit*, Mr Moore !

*Jan. 7* Cutting from a provincial newspaper : "The quartets  
*Monday.* played were those of Cesar French in D major and Hugo Folf's Italian Serenade."

Letter from a young highbrow asking whether I am aware that I base my prose on the principle of systole and diastole. Somewhat spoils the effect of this by calling Jock and me the Caster and Pollocks

of dramatic criticism. After which I am not surprised to hear that I am "a jagua wollowing in its jungle."

*Jan. 8* E. V. Lucas once said in praise of a man that "he never  
*Tuesday.* let you know if he was tired." I just can't help showing when I am whacked. In the early autumn of 1857 Dickens wrote to Forster :

Too late to say, put the curb on, and don't rush at hills—the wrong man to say it to. I have now no relief but in action. I am become incapable of rest. I am quite confident I should rust, break, and die, if I spared myself. Much better to die, doing. What I am in that way, nature made me first, and my way of life has of late, alas ! confirmed. I must accept the drawback—since it is one—with the powers I have ; and I must hold upon the tenure prescribed to me.

Why do I quote this ? Because at the pantomime at the Cambridge last night I remember lighting a cigar as the curtain went up. And then nothing more till it came down at the end of the first half. And they told me that the Ganjou Brothers had been throwing Juanita about !

*Jan. 10* Letter to an old friend :  
*Thursday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

I sat up late last night re-reading Max's *And Even Now*. In the very first essay, "A Relic," I thought I caught Max out in the sentence: "A temper so violent as Mlle Angélique's must surely have brought its owner to the grave, long since." Could Max be right, and Fowler, after all these years, wrong ? Can 'since' be used in the sense of 'ago' ? Unlike Max to use a vulgarism in a book every sentence of which has been, to use Lear's phrase, "squinnied at." Three o'clock in the morning found me looking for some classic example which would justify Max. I found it in Sir Philip Sidney : "About two years since, it so fell out, that he was brought to a great lady's house."

In the essay "Quia Imperfectum" I found a charming howler. Max, projecting a museum of uncompleted masterpieces—this to include Penelope's web and the original designs for the Tower of Babel—suggests "an early score of that one unfinished Symphony of Beethoven's—I forget the number of it, but anyhow it is my favourite." *Why don't men of letters get somebody to check them when they write of things outside their range ?*

And then I really did catch him out. This was in the essay "A Point to be Remembered," the point being that the Very Eminent, desirous of making an impression on a greenhorn, should always make an entry and never be entered upon: "Let those of them who have been playgoers cast their minds back to their experience of theatres. Can they recall a single play in which the principal actor was 'discovered' sitting or standing on the stage when the curtain rose? No. The actor, by the very nature of his calling, does, must, study personal effect. *No playwright would dare to dump down his principal actor at the outset of a play.*" (Italics mine.) Whereupon I began to cast about for refutation of Max's theory. *Richard III*: "Now is the winter of our discontent." *Volpone*: "Good morning to the day, and next, my gold!" *Faustus*: "Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin." Manly, in *The Plain Dealer*: "Tell not me, my good Lord Plausible, of your decorums, supercilious forms, and slavish ceremonies." Valentine, in *Love for Love*, telling Jeremy to clear his books away. Sir John Brute, in *The Provok'd Wife*, saying, "What cloying meat is love, when matrimony's the sauce to it!" And what about Almeria, in Congreve's *The Mourning Bride*—that play which, d'you remember, was the first cause of our coming together?—with her "Music has charms to soothe the savage breast"? Peer Gynt telling his mother he's not lying? Rebecca West telling the housekeeper to lay the table for supper? And Alice telling Edgar, in Strindberg's *Dance of Death*, that it would be decent to keep quiet about a silver wedding? These are all I had thought of up till 4 A.M.

Ever,

JAMES AGATE

P.S. 5 A.M. What about *Œdipus Rex* and *Le Misanthrope*?

Jan. 13      Peter Brook, the stage director, has an interesting letter  
Sunday.      in to-day's *S.T.* about his recent production of *King John*  
at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre:

It was obvious from the first that the audience would miss the meaning, and thus the force, of the whole of the great soliloquy about "Commodity" because of the complete change of sense that this word has undergone. Yet, to substitute another word throughout would have been unpardonably irritating to those who knew the speech. Consequently we introduced an extra phrase on the first appearance of the word to 'plant' its meaning:

That smooth-fac'd gentleman, *Expediency*,  
Or, as they say, tickling Commodity,  
Commodity, the bias of the world. . . .

P. B. seems to be worried about the legitimacy of this. On the whole I am for rather than against, *when strictly necessary*. In the

Bastard's speech there is no great poetry to be interfered with, and no familiar passage. But are we to have the emendation

Thus conscience—*meaning thereby consciousness, Awareness*—does make cowards of us all ?

Or

Season your admiration—*since you start, And all your visage cries astonishment*—  
With an attent ear, etc., etc.

I strongly suspect that when Lady Macbeth told her husband he had "broke the good meeting With most admired disorder" she was not using "admired" in the modern sense. But I should boggle at some such elucidatory rewriting as :

LADY M. You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting,  
With most admired disorder—*going off*  
*The deep end at a silly, peevish ghost*  
*Strongly suggests that Scotland's majesty*  
*Should get a hold on's self.*

And I should certainly not allow any Macbeth I directed to enlarge thus-wise :

Thou hast no speculation—*naught to do*  
*With throwing sprat to catch your mackerel,*  
*Nor yet debating if to be or not,*  
*Nor e'en that perlustration Walkley loved,*  
*But used in purest sense of optic power,*  
*The opposite of nictitation,*  
*Ablepsy, amaurosis, and the like—*  
*Let me repeat : horrible shadow, know*  
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes  
Which thou dost glare with.

But enough of babble, as Gilbert's Lady Jane remarked.

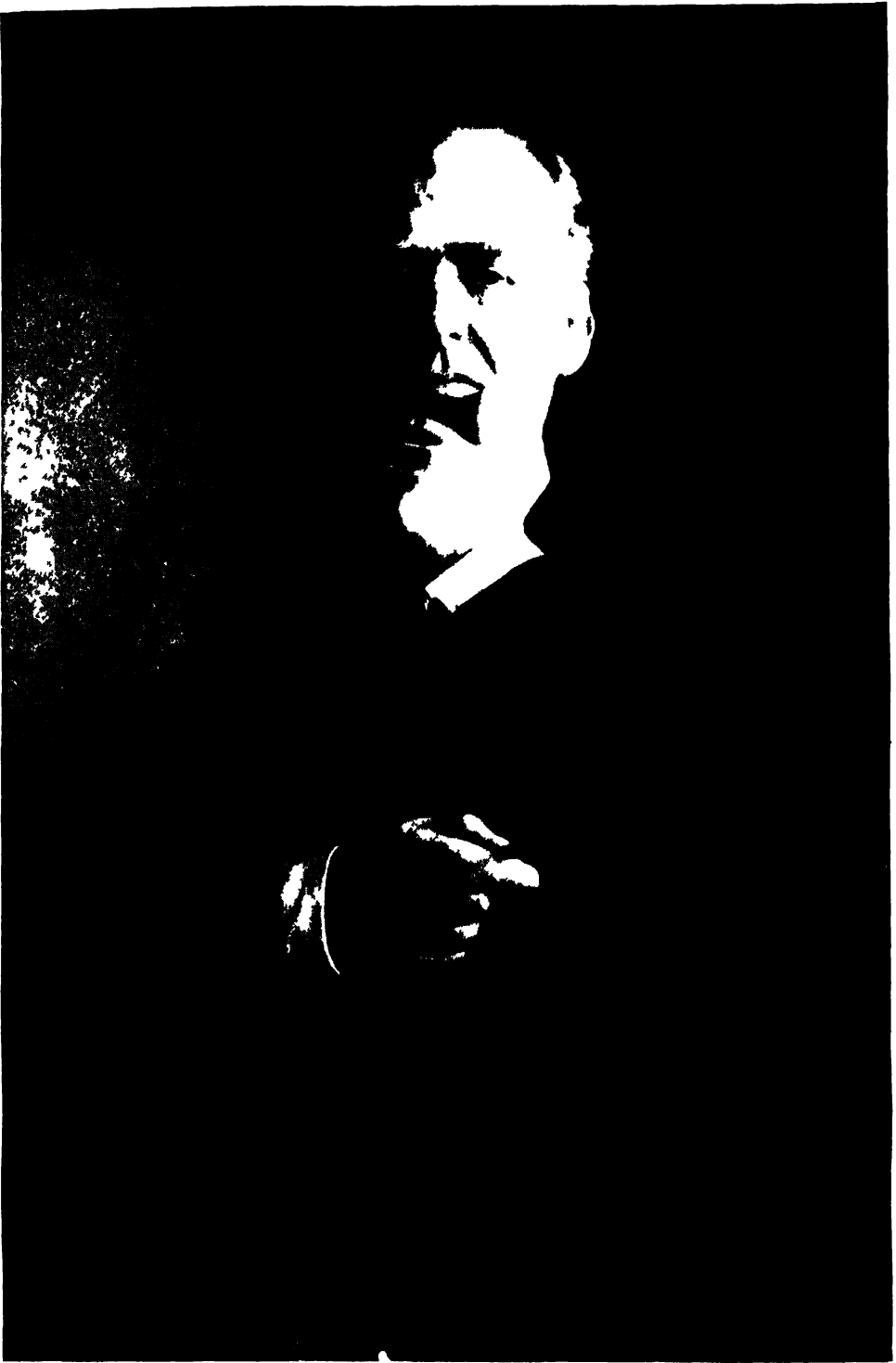
Jan. 14 From Henry Treece :  
Monday.

I see you have been naughty again. Nevertheless, I commend your assiduity in smacking me. I cannot believe that you don't like Boogie. That would be like saying you won't have a telephone in your house, or cannot stand Technicolor. Anyway, I shall say a bad thing about you in my next book, *How I See Apocalypse*, as though you or I cared.

HENRY TREECE

But it is in Mrs Osa Johnson's *Bride in the Solomons* that I find the final word on Boogie-Woogie. It appears that if, in these islands, you want a native to bring you your saw you say, "You ketchum one fellah saw belong me." If the man is exceptionally stupid you have





*Photo Baron*

*Basil Cameron*

*"Shall I take my niblick?"*



to explain to him that the saw is part of the hammer family. Wherefore you say, "You ketchum one fellah, he brother belong hammer. You push him, he go; you pull him, he come." Boogie-Woogie bears the same relation to music that the Solomon Islander's gibberish bears to English.

Jan. 15 "Mais je vais vivre! Ah! que je me sens bien!" were Tuesday. the last words of Dumas's heroine. Jan de Hartog's young woman puts it the other way round: "Let me die! I have all I want!" This pair had two things in common—consumption and a lover. Well, times change, as somebody remarked. One hundred—to be exact, ninety-eight—years ago union with the beloved was the be-all of existence; to judge from Hartog's *Death of a Rat* (Lyric, Hammersmith), union to-day is the end-all. But perhaps we should look not to the time-lapse, but to the characters for the explanation of so startling a *volte-face*. Poor Marguerite was, God bless us, a thing of naught, whereas Yolán is a distillation of pure spirit. As I sat in my stall I couldn't help thinking of that Julia, spouse of Henry Wititterly, certified as "all soul" by Sir Tumley Snuffim, and for whose life that eminent physician would not give a pinch of snuff. Not that he did not do his medical best. "I believe I may venture to say," said Mr Wititterly, "that Mrs Wititterly is the first person who took the new medicine which is supposed to have destroyed a family at Kensington Gravel Pits." And Julia, in a faint voice, believed she was. If I had been one of the two doctors in de Hartog's play I should have tried the stuff on Yolán. The pretentious creature was a Bachelor of Astronomy. In addition, she was a Galtonic visualiser, or possibly a Dunne's-Theory-of-Time-ist (so clever a girl would not need to bother about a Dutch translation) who "interpreted actual reality in terms of prognostic reality." This enabled her to foretell the entry of Holland into the War three months later, and draw a picture of the elderly doctor dangling from a gibbet with blue tongue protruding between blue lips. Which brought us to the atom bomb. And finally to what every highbrow playwright with a gammonable management at his mercy wants to talk about—the ultimate meaning of life and death. "Life," said Yolán, "is expelled from matter at death, and returns as other matter at birth." (Had she never heard of Ibsen's Button-Moulder?) Like Julia Wititterly, Yolán "formed an immense variety of opinions on an immense variety of subjects." Pamela Brown lovely, and not to be kept by boshist or flapdoodler from

pacing upon the mountains overhead, hiding her face amid authentic stars.

Jan. 16            Letter to a columnist :  
Wednesday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

MY DEAR COLLEAGUE,

My justification for this letter, remonstrance, or what you will is that we are colleagues and I am persuaded that we have the same feeling for the memory of a great artist. But I cannot help thinking that you have traduced a great stage figure. Unwittingly, I am sure. Let me come to facts.

You ask, "What should we make of Sarah Bernhardt now? Have we grown out of the particular form her genius took? . . . Perhaps I am influenced by the horror which my only sight of her bred in me—this terrifying old woman with her crimped hair, trying to play a boy of twenty." So far I have nothing to say; you are perfectly entitled to hold, and record, any impression you may have. What, in all courtesy, I will say to you is that you must not misrepresent facts. You say that you saw Sarah Bernhardt play *L'Aiglon* "just before her last illness, from a bath-chair." To which I can only say in my most Shakespearean manner,

Columnist, as low as to thy heart,  
Through the false passage of thy throat, thou liest.

Or put it that thou misstatest and taradiddlest! Thou didst not see Sarah play *L'Aiglon* from a bath-chair. In the absence of qualification this implies that Sarah had that contraption wheeled on to the field of Wagram and spouted from it. If you saw her in this piece after her operation it could only have been in the death scene, which she played on a sort of couch or camp bed. Verneuil is categorical about this:

"She adored *L'Aiglon*, and, being no longer able to perform it herself since her operation, she liked to see it come to life again in the persons of those who succeeded her."

"*L'Aiglon* . . . which she played until she was sixty-nine."

". . . the death of *L'Aiglon*, a magnificent spectacle, but the epilogue of a play in six acts. When she played it alone her regrets became more poignant at having to renounce the rest of the part."

Sarah had an intense horror of the ridiculous. After the amputation of her leg she *never* appeared in any part which

necessitated movement. *Les Cathédrales*, the death scenes of Marguerite Gautier and the little Duc de Reichstadt, *Daniel*, and those portions of one or two classical rôles in which she could declaim from a palanquin or litter—these, I think, were all. To suggest that she broke this self-imposed rule is unfair to a great artist's sense of discretion.

You also tell your readers that Sarah was relatively unknown and had made no particular stir until "in one of those plays which Sardou turned out as rapidly as works our industrious Mr Rattigan" she produced *la voix d'or*.

But what are the facts? The first piece of Sardou in which Sarah played was *Fédora* (1882). Now let us glance at her career up to that point. She had appeared at the Comédie Française in *Hernani*, *Phèdre*, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *Froufrou*, *La Dame aux Camélias*, *Le Sphinx*, *L'Étrangère*, *La Princesse Georges*. She had taken London by storm. (See *La Comédie Française à Londres*, 1871-1879, edited by Georges d'Heylli; Ollendorff, 1880.) She had completed her seven months' tour of America, during which she gave 156 performances in 50 towns, the box-office takings amounting to 2,667,600 francs. She had been hailed by Sarcey as the possessor of "a talent of the first order." Victor Hugo had written verses to her. She had been painted by Parrot, Louise Abbéma, Bastien-Lepage, and Walter Spindler. And here is something which nails to the counter your fiction about the *voix d'or*. I quote from Sarcey's article in the issue of *Le Temps* for November 11, 1872. The great French critic was commenting on Sarah's début at the Comédie in *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle*:

"Elle dit ses trois premiers actes avec un tremblement convulsif, et nous ne retrouvâmes la Sarah de *Ruy Blas* que dans deux couplets qu'elle fila de sa voix *enchanteresse* avec une grâce merveilleuse."

And yet you would have your readers believe that in 1882 Sarah had made no particular stir and the golden voice had not been heard.

Fie upon you, my dear colleague! What about an inch or two of sackcloth and a sprinkling of ashes?

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

Jan. 19            There was a fine gathering at the *Sunday Times*  
Saturday.       luncheon to its editor, W. W. Hadley, in honour of his  
                      eightieth birthday. Witty speeches from Desmond  
MacCarthy and Ernest Newman. R. C. K. Ensor very good on  
W. W.'s kindness, wisdom, and courage. There being nothing left

for me to say, I filled in with some nonsense about the eternal conflict between contributors and advertisers :

I wonder often what the Papers buy  
One half so precious as the Space they sell.

*Jan. 20* Fell in to-night with a Dr Freddy Renner, a native of *Sunday*. Hamburg and a distant connection of my old friends there. He talked to me at length of his recent experiences in Nuremberg, where he has been watching the trial. "Most of the accused are listless and apathetic, like ghosts, or even dead men. Only Goering shows any liveliness, which he uses to curry favour with the Americans." Among the other things I gathered were :

1. The Germans are wholly preoccupied with how to get food, cigarettes, chocolate.

2. In so far as they have a mind for anything else they have no guilt-consciousness.

3. They are indifferent to what happens to the war criminals. These are the men who misled the Fuehrer and let him down.

4. The average German knew nothing about the atrocities, and neither did Hitler.

5. The only hope for Germany is in another Fuehrer.

6. The German ideology is unchanged. War is war. "The Americans are very happy in Nuremberg. Next time we shall be happy in New York."

The foregoing was given to me by Dr Renner as the essence of over a thousand conversations. Dr Renner also told me that the Grand Hotel at Nuremberg is a replica of the film *Congress Dances*, while the rest of the town is desolation.

*Jan. 21* Up at eight, make fire, warm some coffee, and burn some *Monday*. bread, houseboy and char being down with 'flu. Rush to imbecile film. Rush back to record imbecility. Rush to Shakespeare Memorial Luncheon an hour late. (You'd think Stratford could get *Love's Labour's Lost* right. But no ; everybody talks about "Love's Labour Lost.") Speech. Another imbecile film. Record imbecility. Whacked—since I don't get any lunch—to the point of cutting the *News Chronicle* Centenary Jamboree, in spite of having laid out 4s. 6d. on a set of dress studs. Half a bottle of champagne and early bed. Say 2 A.M., as there are still a few things to be done to *Around Cinemas*.

Jan. 24      My secretary, John Booth-Palmer, asked and obtained  
Thursday.    my consent to this letter :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

*The Secretary  
The Students' Union  
The London School of Economics  
Houghton Street  
Aldwych, W.C.2*

DEAR MR SECRETARY,

Please forgive Mr Agate for not replying to your letter right away. I haven't seen my employer for several days. Pressure of work unfortunately prevented him from noticing the pile of correspondence that was gradually collecting round him, and, alas ! he is now completely covered ! The housekeeper, the house-boy, and myself have been working like slaves to get the mass of letters cleared away. We work on the chain system. I type the replies as they hand up the letters. At our present rate it ought not to be long before we uncover Mr Agate, though the postman still mercilessly pours batches through the letter-box. At one time we thought of asking the Borough of Holborn to lend us a snow-plough, but we decided against it, as Mr Agate isn't very strong. An occasional flurry and a few grunts *de profundis* lead us to believe that he is still working.

If you would care to write again in a short time I am sure my employer would be pleased to lecture. Indeed, I think I heard him say so just before he went down.

Yours faithfully,  
JOHN BOOTH-PALMER  
*Secretary*

Jan. 25      Letter from Henry Treece :  
Friday.

*55 Ferriby Road  
Barton upon-Humber  
Lincs*

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

Your Solomon Island hammer-and-saw argot is interesting, though not very relevant. However, it seems to me that the native English has its *uses*. It carries a meaning between a brown man and a white one, which otherwise would not be possible.

Boogie does approximately the same thing, though because of

its formal restrictions that message must be a limited one, as I explained in my article. Nevertheless, it is a message that some people need, and which isn't conveyed by Handel or Scriabin or Delius or Elgar. It is almost purely physical in its appeal, and produces a certain exhilaration, a musical drunkenness, which certain folk like. Now the pleasure of this exhilaration is intense and not to be ignored; any more than one might ignore the pleasures produced by gin and bitters, a nice leg-glide, a beefsteak, or some of Tennyson. For all these pleasures are facets of that multiplicity which adds up to LIFE.

I too know about 'good' music; but I am liberal enough to understand that there is more in music than can be got out of any one composer, or form, or period. Boogie, at its own level, supplies an emotional element of a specialised sort, which is absent in other forms of music. It is a primitive element, but an important one.

It is perhaps foolish to pursue on paper an argument which depends largely on auditory sensations—and I must admit that you were remarkably good at selecting those passages from my article which didn't come off because of that—but I would ask you to listen tolerantly to the piano records of Albert Ammons, "Lux" Lewis, and Pete Johnson some time. I don't imagine that you will ever like Boogie, but I feel sure that you will come to recognise in it a rhythmic and sometimes harmonic subtlety which puts it well above the cultural level of your Solomon Islander's jargon.

Yours sincerely,  
HENRY TREECE

My reply :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

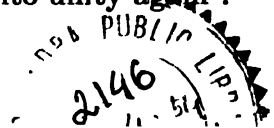
DEAR HENRY TREECE,

But we agree! Many years ago George Moore described the reading of sloppy novels as "an alternative form of bicycling." I am perfectly prepared to regard Boogie-Woogie as an alternative form of sexual intercourse. But I will never call it music.

Yours ever,  
JAMES AGATE

Jan. 27 Granville-Barker (*Prefaces to Shakespeare, Fourth Series*)  
Sunday. doubts whether *Othello* can be ranked with the major tragedies.

Hamlet dies spiritually at peace; Lear's madness has been the means to his salvation; by interpreting his life's hell to us even Macbeth stirs us to some compassion. But what alchemy can bring the once noble Moor and the savage murderer into unity again?





But suppose Shakespeare wasn't bothering about unity? Suppose he happened on Cinthio's story and thought what a damned good play it would make? Why must he always write high-minded tragedies? Why not a full-blooded drama, if he feels like it? The Charles Morgans won't be pleased—I remember how worried the *Times* critic was because Zola's Laurent and Thérèse hadn't the nervous system of the Macbeths—but I don't think that matters. Ivor Brown confessed on Sunday that the "chop her into messes" stuff sickened him—"one should be braced, not sickened, by tragedy." But why insist on tragedy? *Macbeth* is a tragedy, and *Richard III* is a melodrama. I put *Othello* midway between—what the French call a *drame*. No, this isn't a play for the Emersons, the Matthew Arnolds, or any critic who doesn't understand temperament. It has never been a play for English actors, always with the exception of Kean. (Macready? Too moral, too grave, too sublime.) The rest of 'em have all tended to make Othello behave like Mr Dombey apprised by Carker that Edith is extending her favours to Major Bagstock. The Moor's spiritual home is not Portland Place, but all that temperamental zone south of Marseilles where volcanoes spout like whales and pastrycooks rip up their wives for an *œillade*.

Jan. 29 Letter from Ivor Brown :  
Tuesday.

The "Observer"  
22 Tudor Street, E.C.4

DEAR JAMES,

About Othello. If Shakespeare had written a play about a Sicilian pastrycook who knifed his women whenever he fancied another man's paw upon them, well, all right. A Sicilian tragedian could roll about in this mud-and-blood, and nobody would complain. But Othello starts almost as a Noble Roman: he is a rational and admirable man: then, for utterly insufficient reason, he becomes ape and tiger. I don't believe in him—and Iago isn't easy either. The result to me is *sordid* in a way that Shakespeare otherwise is not. Later on he could be (within the conditions of redeeming genius) silly, whimsical, grotesque—but not squalid! If *Othello* is to be judged as a crime-story, then the villain should be a more natural creature than the icy, diabolonian Iago, and Iago's victim must be far less sensible at the start. If the excuse is Moorish Blood, then the *value* of the blood must be manifest earlier instead of spilling over all at once.

Yours,  
I. B.

*Jan. 30* Note from May addressed to Kween Alexandra  
*Wednesday.* Mansions :

*Fernhill,  
Lower Kingswood  
Sunday*

JIMKINS,

I kommiserate with your kold. Here is a pound of koffee.  
Take kare of yourself.

Your krazy sister,  
MAYKINS

P.S. Have diskovered a new way of making the letter 'k.'

*Jan. 31* "Oh that mine adversary had written a book!" Oh  
*Thursday.* that my friends wouldn't write plays! Three hours—  
three hours and a quarter, to be exact—at the West-  
minster to-night: Clifford Bax's sentimental *The Golden Eagle*. All  
about Mary Queen of Scots. Clifford is obviously in love with an  
idealised Mary, who is about as interesting as a tapioca pudding.  
What I wanted to see was the Mary who looked like the flower, but  
was the serpent under it. Endowed with the brains of an Ugly  
Duchess. Resolute and remorseless schemer. Artist and virago,  
scholar and creature of appetite. The brilliantly clever woman  
who, at her trial, conducted her own defence. The defiant martyr  
who went to her execution in a bodice of crimson velvet and a  
petticoat of crimson satin. The obstreperous old girl who, on the  
scaffold, after the Dean of Peterborough had preached an interminable  
sermon at her, stood up to him in disputation and "prayed in opposi-  
tion to him." But then hardly anybody ever writes the play one  
wants on this subject. To-night's company, headed by Claire Luce,  
did, I suppose, all they could with the milk-and-watery stuff. Not a  
glint of humour anywhere, except that every time David Horne came  
on I thought we were going to hear about that other Gunpowder Plot.  
Something to do with the hat and cloak, I suspect.

*Feb. 1* Second letter to my columnist :  
*Friday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

MY DEAR COLLEAGUE,

Your apology, recantation, or what you will has roused most of  
the breed of Agates! My sister writes :

"*Ce monsieur m'agace*. He maintains in his second article that  
he saw Sarah play 'only parts' of *L'Aiglon* from a sitting position.

That again is not true. He saw her play only *one* part—the death scene. Can't you drive it into the dear fellow's head that *Sarah played no scene sitting down which before her operation she would have played standing up*? Then why does he say that 'most of her triumphs were scored in plays not always of the first quality'? Her greatest triumphs were in Racine, Hugo, Musset, Meilhac and Halévy, Dumas *filis*, Rostand, and Maeterlinck. She tried her hand at Shakespeare, Molière, Voltaire, Sudermann, Coppée, Lemaître, Mirbeau, Catulle Mendès, and d'Annunzio. She played *Fédora*, *Tosca*, and the other Sardou pieces for the reason that our own Irving played *The Bells*—the financial reason. And, by the way, tell your friend from me that if he must instruct us about the French theatre, which we saw and he didn't, he might at least get his accents right."

I have discharged the task laid upon me. But I warn you, my dear colleague, that if we have any more nonsense we shall let loose our Brother Mycroft, a javelin of rebuke in comparison with whom May and I are but paper darts.

Ever,  
JAMES AGATE

*Feb. 2* Rummaging in a drawer to-day, I came across this.  
*Saturday.* It seems that I had asked Leo to help me out with a *Tatler* article, and the thing is supposed to be an extract from a highbrow novel I am recommending M.-G.-M. to film :

Basil Bommerly was, as usual, the last to arrive. Hot and dusty from his long journey, he eventailed himself with the *écran* painted by Boucher and given to his grandmother as a girl by Napoleon III. The circle, now complete, gathered round Professor Debuffer to hear something of his adventures in Central Africa. The Professor first produced a curious musical instrument, in shape a little like a helmet, with six strings on each side. This, he explained, was the Malanka-Cambamba, or Magic Harp of Angola, as it is called by the natives. He struck a few chords on this, chanting some verses in the Kapagongo dialect. Beckoning his audience to come nearer, the white-haired savant proceeded :

"When we arrived at Katapana we were received by six chiefs, each of whom offered us a putrescent coconut as an emblem of friendship. I produced my fiddle, Geoffrey Biddulph his viola, and together we played sonatas by Bach for two hours. This greatly excited the chiefs: they danced, and one of the chiefs' wives served us with Choroka-Choroka, a dish consisting of faded aspen-leaves braised in molasses, and a delicacy, I was afterwards informed, normally proffered only to Royalty. A chief called Ovakuangar then played some tribal songs on the Machuculumbwe, a double-flute with twenty holes. This, explained Ovakuangar,

serves the dual purpose of being used as a musical instrument or a weapon in tribal disputes, since it is capable of discharging bullets at the rate of fifty per fifteen seconds. Dr Livingstone, I was told, had some difficulty in evading these missiles after reading the tribe of Chikumbalas lengthy extracts from Wordsworth's *Excursion*.

"After this Sandra Lobilla and I played on our two bassoons, at which the chiefs were much delighted. They danced again and threw spears ecstatically at some of their women, who dodged them with practised *expertise*. One of the chiefs, I regret to say, threw a spear at me which nearly lodged in my rear. I protested against this, but the chief explained that it would be unthinkable, according to the etiquette of his tribe, not to throw a spear at at least one guest in the course of the rejoicings. Next the chiefs ordered their soldiers to perform the Mkanyela, which is danced on one foot and one arm, each soldier balancing simultaneously a giant pineapple on his nose. The effect is enchanting, and reminds one of Gydnya Kosseloffsky in Rostopschin's delightful ballet *Night on the River Vodka*. After the dance the chiefs invited us into their tent, which was decorated with the painted skulls of relatives, and served us with their own hands a huge dish of Bambocha, a fricassee made, so I was told, of the choicest Magagora lizards.

"We also drank the native brew, Chanuhongu, distilled from the gall-bladders of baby ichneumons. On parting the chiefs presented each of us with a skull containing stewed vipers to sustain us on our journey. Altogether a delightful visit, though Sonia Bodega found some difficulty with the native flies—or barotse, I think they are called—which are sometimes as much as two feet long and so powerful that they are capable of snatching up the local babies and carrying them off to the river."

Every one was greatly impressed by the Professor's travel-story, and a nostalgic touch was added when the venerable lecturer threw himself face-downward on the thistles and murmured, in a voice choked with tears, "Karaheitei Bazizuzu Olikaka, kaka, koko." For some moments there was silence. And then, "Quelle nuit ambrosienne !" sighed the Baronne de la Frôle-Derrière.

**Feb. 5** In a delightful letter from G. B. E. Noel, of the Red  
**Tuesday.** House, Lewes Road, East Grinstead :

There is one man who for years went through the most exasperating experiences—not just occasionally, but at least twice nightly and at matinées. And never a word—not even a "tut"—did he utter, although subjected to the ribald laughter of the crowd. Yet he never did anything to improve his lot: whenever I saw him his clothes appeared, like those of the Divine Sarah (Gamp—not Bernhardt), to be "a shade more snuffy," his hair more frowsy, and his boots, like those of the discredited Pecksniff, more dim and villainous. The poor man's appearance would have startled any-

one but a farmer. Starting from the top was—not a hat—that came second on the list—the first was a hank of hair—“if ‘air you calls it”—sticking through holes in the Wreck of the *Hesperus* which was his hat. Frowsy whiskers and stubble covered his face, about a six months’ growth. A football jersey and a great tattered morning-coat that might have been made for a seven-foot-high Herbert Campbell. The tails swept the ground behind, and the ragged sleeves almost did the same to the ground in front; trousers like Charlot’s, only not so smart or well-fitting; and the soles of his boots gaped from the uppers like the jaws of thirsty dogs.

In this very unsuitable outfit the man endeavoured to mount a bicycle which was in an even worse condition than his wardrobe. Whereas his clothes at least hung together, his machine did not; it seemed to disintegrate before one’s eyes whenever he tried to make the smallest adjustment. What struck me most about this man was his infinite patience *rebus in arduis*. If his sleeves caught once in his bicycle they caught a dozen times. They caught in the handlebars, the brake, the saddle, the pedals, the spokes, the step—everywhere; and each time he carefully disentangled his rags—in case he tore them, I suppose—and started all over again like Carlyle. He had evidently neglected the care of his machine as much as his toilet, as no nuts were tight—in fact, when he was at last in the saddle the handlebars came out by the roots as soon as he sat back. He rode round and round on the bicycle, and each time he came round full circle there was something else missing, until at last there was nothing left but a sort of elemental cycle; a monocycle now, just one wheel and pedals, and he was still riding it. But laugh! What an artist!

After the show I had been invited to the Vaudeville Club, where my friend the secretary asked if I’d like a game of billiards. He then introduced me to a very dapper little man, and I thought to myself how very neat he looked and how well turned out. He was clean-shaven, with hair newly trimmed. He wore a white stiff collar with what looked like a new navy blue suit and shoes obviously finished off with a bone. “Sorry,” I said to the secretary, “I did not quite get the name.” “Sam Barton,” answered the secretary. “You know, the Tramp Cyclist!”

*Feb. 7* At Firth Shephard’s luncheon to-day sat between Mary  
*Thursday.* Jerrold and Coral Browne. Firth told us that in his new play there would be thirty-six young actresses—not chorus-girls, but actresses. What did Mr A. say to that? Mr A. said he hadn’t thought there were thirty-six actresses in the country. Harry Green, superb in accent and gesture, told a wonderful story. How, when he gives his six-year-old son a present costing a dollar, the kid immediately sells it to his young brother for two dollars. “I tink it should be because his mother is Swedish!”

**Feb. 8** Here are the first half-dozen in my new series entitled  
**Friday.** *Winged Words :*

**No. 1 :** Miss Courtneidge is our English Duse.

*Dramatic critic, evening paper*

**No. 2 :** The very title, *Œdipus Rex*, evokes the smart psychologist's waiting-room, or the shades of plump Good-time Charlies who used to trail round the Riviera in the wake of their mammas.

*Columnist in smart weekly*

**No. 3 :** Monia Liter's music can be as sentimental as a baby's toes.

*Radio critic, Sunday paper*

**No. 4 :** Miss X has the snubbiest nose, the trustingest eyes, the friendliest little mug in all womanhood. She moves as though there were little toy balloons under her feet.

*Film critic, daily paper*

**No. 5 :** Like many other musicians, Johann Strauss obtained his first musical education in a church. One day his teacher found him swinging a nifty polka. Like Geraldo and Jack Payne, young Strauss had to get about a bit.

*Organist at West End cinema*

**No. 6 :** One happy afternoon when God was feeling good He sat down and thought up a beautiful country, and He called it the U.S.A.

*From the film "Forever in Love"*

**Feb. 10** Noses, ears, and lips ! Likewise, goats and monkeys !  
**Sunday.** What is this demon of inaccuracy which pursues me even to my bed ? I am comfortably tucked up last night with the second volume of *A Shorter Ego*, where I read about the War Office apologising to me for not having been able to *race* my address. So I fling the book into the fireplace, reach for Kingsmill's *Johnson without Boswell*, and open it at :

Cleanse the *full* bosom of that perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart.

Why does H. K. make Johnson misquote ? Or are we to believe that Johnson accepted Pope's wretched emendation ? This morning I open the *Observer*, and find Ivor writing about last week's murder play at the Embassy, " We are in no mood for watching the heart of our blood-boltered Mr Bowling melt in the presence of a pious miss." But Shakespeare applies his adjective to his murderee and not to his murderer. To 'bolter' is old provincial English, meaning to 'mat in

tufts'; and it was Banquo's hair which became matted, and not Macbeth's.

Talked about this to-night to the Sixty-three Club, which has something to do with the United Universities Club in Suffolk Street. Went on to compare the thoroughness of fifty years ago with the slipshodderly of to-day. Was terribly tired when I began, but freshened up after a bit.

*Feb. 12* Speech at the Luncheon for the Reopening of the Curzon  
*Tuesday.* Cinema :

MR CHAIRMAN, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN :

No young film critic has ever heard of Chadband. These clever young gentlemen will tell you all about Pudovkin's "Theoretical Postulates of Discontinuity"! But they raise their eyebrows if you mention Joe Gargery or Harold Skimpole, and it is inconceivable that any of them should have heard of Chadband. Wherefore, for the benefit of these young intellectuals, should there be any present to-day, I shall explain that Chadband is a character in a novel by Charles Dickens. That he was a large, oily man with the idiosyncrasy, or what non-highbrows call habit, of defining things by their opposites, and generally in the form of a question. "My friends, what is peace? Is it war? No. Is it strife? No."

One of the ways of describing the films at the Curzon Cinema, which has given us so many hours of delight and whose reopening we are celebrating to-day, is to say what in the past they were *not* like. I have been looking up my cutting-books to see what was being produced at other West End cinemas in the same week that the Curzon opened. I find that at the largest of them I saw one of New York's Four Hundred, dressed in the height of fashion of 1934, explaining to her husband in a crater on Mount Vesuvius that she had always been faithful to him. "I knew it," he said. This was his dying utterance, and as the curtains drew together the rose-pink sirocco carried the words away.

That was the kind of film which the Curzon did *not* present. Well, what kind did it present? What did it lead off with? It led off, I find, with a drama about Franz Schubert dying of mislaid spectacles and a broken heart. In a cornfield, which presently merged into a cathedral, with Martha Eggerth in full blast at the famous *Ave Maria*. Next there was a film about Beethoven, who contracted deafness through listening to the voice of Nature in a thunderstorm. However, it didn't really matter, because throughout the rest of the film that great actor Harry Baur was busy composing the "Moonlight Sonata," and a deaf man can listen to moonlight as well as one whose hearing is perfect.

I don't think the Curzon is going to make those mistakes again. I don't think it will show us Tschaikowsky hammering away at that

concerto, or our Mr Addinsell concocting that Warsaw rubbish. It is true that we are threatened with something about Berlioz and his *Symphonie Fantastique*. But I feel that the French film of to-day fantasticates better than it did. It is announced that the Curzon will give us none but French films—in my humble opinion the best in the world. This being so, think of the lovely things we are *not* going to have. No Hollywood star or starlet. No British bread-and-butter Miss explaining to James Mason or Stewart Granger in a modern West Kensington accent that she is Defoe's Moll Flanders. No cinema organist alternating Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are" with Handel's *Largo*. No. We look forward to films as sophisticated as the one we saw this morning. On behalf of the guests here to-day I thank this utterly delightful cinema, whose reopening makes us giddy with expectation, for this morning's film. Let me assure the new management that whatever films it puts forward will receive the critics' fascinated, rapt attention.

*Feb. 14*            Wolfitt will have to take comfort in the fact that a man  
*Thursday.*        may be a very fine actor and still not succeed as Othello.  
                      There was Irving, for example. Dutton Cook ended his  
notice of the 1876 performance :

Mr Irving's acting abounds in emotion and passion, with grateful intervals of desperate calm, as when Othello stands petrified and aghast at his own most miserable folly and crime, resembling, it must be confessed, as he folds round him his robe, one of the late Mr Fenimore Cooper's Mohawk braves draped in his blanket.

Shall say on Sunday what Henry Morley said about Fechter in the same rôle : " Though he wins no laurels, he loses none." After all, it was very clever of D. W. to arrange that, as the old Hungarian song so nearly said, more was not lost on Mohawk's field.

*Feb. 18*        Week-end at Brighton on my disgusting doctor's orders.  
*Monday.*       Find that my bedroom is on the fifth floor in an hotel  
                      without a lift. Asthma supervening, I crawl along the  
front at the rate of a hundred yards every quarter of an hour, having to stand in my tracks for two or three minutes at a time. As this is a bore to me and a nuisance to my friends, finally retire to hotel lounge, having slipped a lot of work in among my shirts. Wretchedly nervy the entire time, but am completely restored, or as much restored as I can expect to be, on getting into Victoria Station.



*Feb. 21*            On the advice of my increasingly disgusting doctor  
*Thursday.*        see a specialist, who asks if I can go to live in South  
Africa. I say I can't and won't, whereupon he recom-  
mends half a teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda after breakfast. All  
this takes up the entire morning. Which means that before I go to  
bed I must write my *Sunday Times* article about last night's play,  
see to-night's play, write about that, and then break the back of my  
*Express* stuff.

*Feb. 23*            *Scarlet Street*, the new film at the Leicester Square  
*Saturday.*        Theatre, has been banned in America. Presumably  
because it shows a gold-digger, her fancy boy, and an  
amorous old fool for what they are. Had the first been shown as the  
victim of a brutal stepfather, the second as Mr Decent-at-Heart  
anxious to retrace his steps and take the right turning, and the third  
as an old gentleman whose form of going gaga is being kind to little  
girls all would have been well. But since they are painted for what  
they are, and since the picture shows their alleged inevitable bad end,  
America, which includes Chicago, in its pudicity has banned it.  
A really immoral film would have shown the three in their true  
colours and living together in perfect amity. Which, of course,  
is what happens in real life. For myself I thought it a grand  
film, and when I got home re-read that section of *Splendeurs et*  
*Misères* which Balzac called "A combien l'Amour revient aux  
Vieillards."

*Feb. 24*            *A Shorter Ego* was published during the week. Am  
*Sunday.*        horrified to find that in the entry for February 8, 1919  
I ask what Macbeth's going hence has to do with Lady M.  
"Macbeth's" should be "Duncan's," of course. This figures in my  
comprehensive list of *errata* made some months ago. But too late  
for the short version, which was then binding. I suppose slips of the  
pen—I prefer to call them slips of the mind—are unavoidable. Only  
last week in the *ST*. I alluded to "an old *Russian* song," knowing  
all the time that it is *Hungarian*. On Monday morning I received  
three postcards: "*Hungarian*, darling!" "*Hungarian*, Mr Know-  
all!" "*Hungarian*, you bloody fool!" But the slips should be  
very rare. What I cannot understand is the columnist who gets  
every other French accent wrong and discourses of Victorian Sardou  
and Michael Arlan. Or the first-rate publisher who can pass *père de*

*famille.* Or the admirable novelist who can quote from the old rhyme

They drink the champagne she sends them,  
and not hear that there is a syllable missing. I shan't be able to sleep  
until I have dropped the author a postcard :

They drink the champagne what she sends them.

*Feb. 26* Rest-cure not going well. Rush to idiotic film about  
*Tuesday.* one of those young Americans who graduate at a university, study art in Paris, and return home with a vocabulary of words of one syllable : " She looked good to me, and she smelled good to me." The whole thing took place in a wallow of Techni-horror, a welter of swimming-pools, and a world of arrested mental development. Back to flat and prepare speech in honour of seventieth birthday of Harrap's Chairman. Eat too little and drink too much, with result that speech goes well. To flat again, where I sit down to write a thousand words about this morning's rubbish, but must break off to receive a deputation from the French Embassy, who want me to find a theatre for a young group of French players calling themselves " L'Atelier." Get rid of deputation with maximum Agatian charm, finish article, and then in a snowstorm to Swiss Cottage, where I sit in a rotten temper through Sean O'Casey's *Red Roses for Me*. Now I just don't believe in an Irish navvy who says, " Time's a perjured jade, an' ever he moans a man must die." But then I have enough wit left to realise that I am not supposed to believe in an actual navvy any more than in actual Dublin slatterns chanting in unison like a Greek chorus composed of Kathleen ni Houlihans. To cut it short, the trouble with to-night's play is that the characters talk O'Casey's poetry and not theirs. Arrive at the Café Royal round about ten and find it closed, grab a bite somewhere else, and then home, where I sit up to some unthinkable hour struggling with a first draft for Sunday.

*Feb. 27* Work all day on the O'Casey stuff, then to theatre,  
*Wednesday.* home about midnight, and another go at the wretched article, which won't come right.

*Feb. 28* " My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the  
*Thursday.* wilderness," said Wilde's Dr Chasuble, " can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful or, as in the present case, distressing." At seven o'clock to-night, while still

hammering away at that difficult *S.T.* article, remember that at eight I am addressing the students of St Mary's Hospital and have got nothing ready. Booth-Palmer suggests I should use the lecture to the Sixty-three Club delivered some three weeks ago, which is all right except that neither of us can find it. Decide instead to use Tuesday's speech (Harrap's) coupled with the orations at the Curzon and Shephard luncheons. Great success ! Whaur's your Dr Chasuble noo ?

*March 1* Here are the final exhibits in the Shakespeare-Bacon  
*Friday.* controversy :

*Exhibit A.* Letter from J. A. to his friend Edward D. Johnson :

You make me very cross. Only the most pedantic, pernickety, and even brain-sickly accuracy excuses entry into the lists of the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy. Why, then, on page twenty-four of your *The Fictitious Shakespeare Exposed* do you say :

" If Will Shaksper, the countryman, was the author of the plays, he was curiously unobservant of animated nature. Nowhere in the plays do we find any mention of a kingfisher, an otter, a water rat, a moorhen, or a heron. In all the woods in the plays there is no wood-pigeon, woodpecker, or squirrel " ?

*Otter.* What about the following colloquy from *Henry IV, Part I* ?

FAL. Setting thy womanhood aside, thou art a beast to say otherwise.

HOST. Say, what beast, thou knave, thou ?

FAL. What beast ! why, an otter.

PRINCE. An otter, Sir John ! why an otter ?

FAL. Why, she's neither fish nor flesh ; a man knows not where to have her.

*Water rat.* What about *The Merchant of Venice* ?

SHYLOCK. There be land-rats and water-rats.

*Heron.* I need not remind you that Hamlet's " I know a hawk from a handsaw " refers to the heron.

*Squirrel.* There are three references in the plays. You will find them in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Now tell me. If I find you wrong in matters that I can check sitting at my desk how am I to trust you in matters for whose verification I must go abroad ?

The motto of all Baconians should be Polonius's

Hath there been such a time, I'd fain know that,  
That I have positively said " 'tis so,"  
When it proved otherwise ?

Why, then, do you say " 'tis so " when there is a hundred-to-one chance that it isn't so ? You say that " Jonson described Shaksper as ' a poet ape, an upstart, a hypocrite and a thief.' " I take it that this refers to an epigram in the collected edition of Ben Jonson's works, first published in 1616 ? Now let's be clear about this. Here is the epigram, and you will tell me if it is the one you are alluding to :

ON POET-APE

Poor Poet-Ape, that would be thought our chief,  
Whose works are e'en the frippery of wit,  
From brokage is become so bold a thief,  
As we, the robbed, leave rage and pity it.  
At first he made low shifts, would pick and glean,  
Buy the reversion of old plays ; now grown  
To a little wealth, and credit in the Scene,  
He takes up all, makes each man's wit his own.  
And, told of this, he slights it. Tut, such crimes  
The sluggish gaping auditor devours ;  
He marks not whose 'twas first : and aftertimes  
May judge it to be his, as well as ours.  
Fool, as if half eyes will not know a fleece  
From locks of wool, or shreds from the whole piece ?

But where is the actual name which would put the thing beyond doubt ? I agree that the epigram points to Shakespeare and, if you like, that there is nobody else who fills the bill. But surely what you should have written is " Jonson described an assuming-bumptious dramatist—*presumably* Shakespeare, etc."

I am (a) disquieted, because now I don't know how much you have faked—or taken for granted, which amounts to faking—in your *Don Adriano's Letter* ; and (b) worried, because I am getting communications from eminent K.C.'s asking why I don't make mincemeat of you.

*Exhibit B.* Letter from Edward D. Johnson :

You are right in thinking that I was referring to the epigram in Ben Jonson's works published in 1616. I think it is clear that this epigram refers to Shaksper, as there is no one else who can possibly fill the bill. I agree that I should have written the paragraph as you suggest.

With regard to *Don Adriano's Letter* ; I set out the letter as it appears in the First Folio, together with a table showing all of the letters. It is impossible for this table to be faked, as anyone can check it over for himself. The signatures are clearly in the table, and cannot be the result of accident. If you care to send me the names and addresses of the eminent K.C.'s you mention I will send them a copy of *Don Adriano's Letter* and ask them what they make of it.

I do not know if you have ever studied that great book the First Folio. If some day you could spare me one half-hour of your precious time I should like to show you the First Folio, and I am quite sure that I could convince you that this was a production of Francis Bacon's.

Can you account for the fact that in the First Folio we get the following message: "F Bacon all my writings I did place in the grave at Stratford of our actor Master Will Shaksper A grave on peril of a curse I will devise In the hollow ground under earth behind a grate of iron bars there will be found my books"? The curse on the grave was evidently placed there by F. B. to prevent the superstitious villagers from disturbing the grave for a considerable period of time. It is, of course, impossible to get the grave opened, as the Shakespeare Trust would fight tooth and nail to prevent this, as they would be afraid that if the grave was opened it would probably mean the end of Shaksper, Stratford, and the Shakespeare Trust.

*Exhibit C.* Second letter from J. A. to E. D. J. :

I am enormously interested in what you tell me about the First Folio. I suppose the 'message' is one of those cryptogram things. Something of this sort? Since 'William Shakespeare' contains eighteen letters the solver takes the eighteenth, thirty-sixth, and fifty-fourth letters, and so on, until he gets his 'message.' If he finds that he wants a seventeenth letter instead of an eighteenth he just knocks the 'e' off the end of 'Shakespeare.' Does he want the sixteenth letter? Then he also deletes the 'e' in the middle. And so on with all the various ways of spelling 'Shakespeare.' And then there's 'William,' or 'Will,' or just 'W.' Or the first name could be omitted altogether. And if the thing doesn't come right that way the solver jettisons 'William Shakespeare' and starts again with 'Francis Bacon.' It must be great fun. Now, my dear sir. Am I doing the Baconians an injustice or not? Could you briefly give me an idea of how this 'message' is arrived at?

*Exhibit D.* Second letter from E. D. J., shortened :

Francis Bacon inserted a number of ciphers in the First Folio of the 'Shakespeare' Plays, one of the most interesting being what may be termed a sixth-line word cipher. He chose the sixth lines because he never missed an opportunity of showing the numerical seal or count of the name Bacon, which is 33. When planning the lay-out of the First Folio he decided that each full column should contain 66 lines, as 66 is double 33, which represents his name. Looking at the number six six, he thought it would be a

good idea to insert cipher messages on the sixth line counting down and the sixth line counting up the columns, but as this would not give him sufficient scope he decided also to use the sixth lines counting up or down from the entrance or exit of a character, and also the sixth lines counting up or down from the beginning or end of a scene, and it will be found that this is the method that he adopted. He also used the reverse page numbers, and to show the reader that he is going to do this he numbered the last page in the First Folio, which should be 399, 993—the reverse of 399. He also mis-paged certain of the pages to make pages bear the same number, either true or false. This sixth-line word cipher is an extraordinary piece of work, and the way in which he inserted words in lines which bear the same number counting from certain points on pages which bear or represent the same number, and then arranged for such words when joined together and interlocked to form sentences to convey messages to the reader, and his ability to incorporate such words in the text so as to make sense with the rest of the text, is almost beyond human comprehension. But the fact remains that he did so, taking a great delight (although it may appear childish) in juggling with letters, words, and numbers, to make them do exactly what he wished. Only a man with a mathematical brain and an infinite capacity for taking pains could have carried out such an arduous task.

Johnson then gives seven lines from the First Folio, with the italicised words alleged to constitute the message :

“ *Heeres the challenge, reade it, I warrant theres* ”  
 “ *Must we pursue and I have found a path to it* ”  
 “ *Not stay for him to kill him, have I not at the place I did* ”  
 “ *In all my writings. Go with me and see* ”  
 “ *have the gift of a Grave* ”  
 “ *Last night I heard they lay at Stony Stratford* ”  
 “ *But beare it as our Roman actors do* ”

A message to the reader is at once seen formed out of the words at the *beginning* or *end* of these lines, with the exception of the last line, when the words to complete the message are found in the middle of this line, as follows : “ Here’s the challenge, read it—I warrant there’s a path to it—I did place—all my writings in—our actor’s—Stratford Grave.”

*Exhibit E.* Third letter from J. A. to E. D. J. :

I am not surprised that the message given in your second letter doesn’t quite tally with the first. I don’t suppose you carry your First Folio about with you any more than I used to cart around my books on the Dreyfus case. Nor will I boggle at the assumption

that "our actor" means Shakespeare; it couldn't be anybody else. Or at the transpositions without which you would be defeated. But there is one thing I want to ask. When did F. B. place his writings in the grave? Before, during, or after the funeral? Is there any evidence that he was at the funeral? Travelling in those days was a slow business. The news would have had to get from Stratford to London, and then F. B. would have to make his journey. (We know that the funeral took place within three days.) Is there any evidence as to the date at which the "Cursed be he" tablet, or whatever it is, was set up? Did F. B., if he wasn't at the funeral, break into the grave later and then set up the warning? He talks about "a grate of iron bars," which is a cumbersome bit of furniture. Is it supposed that F. B. did all the tinkering unbeknown to the Church authorities? Didn't they question an old gentleman prowling around in the dead of night? Or did F. B. declare his identity? Then, in the spring of 1616, when Ellesmere, the Lord Chancellor, was dangerously ill, wasn't Bacon pretty busy trying to manœuvre himself into the job? Would he, in the circumstances, be likely to be wandering about the country prising open tombs? If it wasn't F. B., who was his deputy? I don't expect a complete answer to these questions, since this would probably take up too much of your time. What I should like is the general line of reply. And may I ask you to put established facts in black ink, and surmises in red?

*Exhibit F.* Third letter from E. D. J. :

You ask me a number of questions which I cannot possibly answer, and which I should imagine no one else can either, after a lapse of 330 years. If any writings were placed in the grave it must have been some considerable time after the funeral, probably when the slab containing the curse was placed over the grave. So far as I know the first reference to the curse is in Malone (1790). F. B. in the cipher says that he erected the statue on the church wall. He must have obtained the permission of the Church authorities to do this, but how or when we shall never know. W. S. died in April 1616.

It would take some time to produce both the curse tablet and the monument, and it seems quite likely that these were not placed in the church for several years after the death of W. S., and this would give F. B. plenty of time to collect the writings ready for interment at the time the curse tablet was placed on the grave. There are, of course, no established and proven facts, and that is the trouble. The claim that F. B. wrote the plays does not depend on this cipher, but on the evidence contained in the First Folio, and that is the reason why I want to show you a number of very interesting things in this great book, quite apart from this cipher.

*Exhibit G. Fourth and concluding letter from J. A. :*

I shall be delighted if next time you are in Town you will bring me the First Folio, if it's portable, when I promise you I will look at it in a "trifling, ladylike, amateur manner" that isn't going to compromise me. I think you Baconians have got something. But not everything; I just cannot believe that all these cryptograms and ciphers are flukes. My theory is that F. B., who was a frequenter of playhouses, fell in with young Shaksper from Stratford, and that the two put their heads together in a trifling and gentlemanlike manner that didn't compromise either of them. What I will not believe is that Shaksper had enough knowledge of the polite world to produce the whole of the plays himself, or that the author of the essays, which read like the prospectus of an insurance company dealing in endowment policies, had an ounce of poetry in his composition. But deeper into the subject I will not delve. It has for me the same fascination as the Dreyfus case, the Mystery of the *Marie Celeste*, and the Wallace case. Or you might put it that while in respect of this question of total authorship I am a poor Shaksperite I am a hell of a bad Baconian.

I wind up with a note from my friend Arnold Taylor :

One might wish that W. S.'s dealings in malt and in his old age were otherwise, but not long ago it was discovered that the blameless Titian, when in his nineties, indulged in some very shady speculations in timber, so William is at least in good company. I have a book *Le Mystère Shakespearien*, by Georges Counes, a Dijon professor. It sets out the theories of the various claimants to the authorship of the plays—Bacon, Oxford, Derby, and Rutland. He does not criticise them, but leaves them to contradict each other. And his witty conclusion is "Il me semble que, comme Bacon disait que, si un peu de science éloigne de Dieu, beaucoup de science y ramène, si une étude superficielle du problème Shakespearien éloigne de Shakespeare, une longue étude y ramène." To which I think we may safely say "Amen."

*March 2* Quiller-Couch, Maurice Baring, Logan Pearsall Smith—  
*Saturday.* I have regarded these three as a preserve of my own.

In the sense that I was always dipping into *Shakespeare's Workmanship*, *Punch and Judy*, and *On Reading Shakespeare*, and alone of the dramatic critics quoted from them. Often. And now the last of this gracious trio has gone. I never met "Q," and was on the point of writing to tell him of many years of admiration when he died; wherefore a few weeks later I persuaded the B.B.C.



to let me give a Sunday reading from the essay on *The Tempest*. I set this down for reasons similar to those which made Pearsall Smith think it lawful to copy out De Quincey's famous passage on the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth* :

I conclude by asseverating that were a greater than Ariel to wing down from Heaven and stand and offer me to choose which, of all the books written in the world, should be mine, I should choose—not the *Odyssey*, not the *Æneid*, not the *Divine Comedy*, not *Paradise Lost* ; not *Othello* nor *Hamlet* nor *Lear* ; but this little matter of 2000 odd lines—*The Tempest*. “ What ?—rather than *Othello* or than *Lear* ? ” Yes : for I can just imagine a future age of men, in which *their* characterisation has passed into a curiosity, a pale thing of antiquity ; as I can barely imagine, yet can just imagine, a world in which the murder of Desdemona, the fate of Cordelia, will be considered curiously, as brute happenings proper to a time outlived ; and again, while I reverence the artist who in *Othello* or in *Lear* purges our passion, forcing us to weep for present human woe, *The Tempest*, as I see it, forces diviner tears, tears for sheer beauty ; with a royal sense of this world and how it passes away, with a catch at the heart of what is to come. And still the sense is royal : it is the majesty of art : we *feel* that we are greater than we know. So on the surge of our emotion, as on the surges ringing Prospero's island, is blown a spray, a mist. Actually it dwells in our eyes, bedimming them : and as involuntarily we would brush it away, there rides in it a rainbow ; and its colours are wisdom and charity, with forgiveness, tender ruth for all men and women growing older, and perennial trust in young love.

Neither did I ever meet Logan Pearsall Smith, but am glad to think that I sent his *On Reading Shakespeare* to Maurice Baring, who did not know it, a few weeks before M. B. died. In the section called “ The Enigmas ” L. P. S., discussing the old question whether Shakespeare is better on the stage or in the study, and preferring the second, writes :

How, I ask you, are stage-enthusiasts—I ask you, Granville-Barker, and you, too, Desmond MacCarthy, and you, Maurice Baring—going to answer Robertson, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, Coleridge, Goethe and me ? It is really up to you to make a reply ; and such a reply to be valid should, I suggest, enumerate first of all the scenes in Shakespeare's plays which are only effective upon the stage ; and secondly a record of concrete esthetic experiences, of the rendering of Shakespearean rôles by great actors and actresses by which the imaginative impression of these rôles has been deepened and enriched.

The complete answer to this would need a book. But here, I think, is something out of the play of *Hamlet*. The Ghost has stalked away on the line "*Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me.*" Whereupon Hamlet, lying on the ground, has his "*O all you host of heaven!*" Of all the Hamlets I have seen Wolfitt is the first to go into his swoon lying on his back. He recovers, and apostrophises the first thing that meets his eyes—the stars. Since, in my knowledge, no other Hamlet has thought of this I doubt whether the notion has occurred to many readers. Then take that bit in *King Lear* where the stage direction reads, "*Enter Lear, fantastically dressed with wild flowers.*" I find an enormous increase in pathos when I have the visual sense of the benign, summer-afternoon sunshine. And I certainly do not think that the scene in *Antony and Cleopatra* where the stage direction "*Music of hautboys as under the stage*" leads up to "*'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, now leaves him,*" is as effective to read as when you hear the music and see the soldiers who recognise it as a portent. I think that Pearsall Smith perceived a divided duty in this old allegiance. At one moment he writes :

It certainly does sound preposterous for those who love Shakespeare's drama to peer only through their spectacles at its text ; to shudder at seeing it acted, and to maintain that the fullness of its dramatic effect is thwarted and counteracted by the only means of securing that effect which ever, for a moment, occupied Shakespeare's thoughts.

At another :

I persist in reading Shakespeare's plays with my own intelligence, and in witnessing their performance in a theatre of my own imagination, lit as it is by the light of lamps far different from those which glared before the stage.

But the book is balanced, sane, witty, and lovely everywhere. For myself I have a tripartite duty—to its author, to "Q," and to Maurice.

*March 3 Sunday.* There is this to be said for British films, that they never descend to the level of Hollywood's worst. One day last week I saw a picture in which a horse galloped up to John Wayne, who was throwing steers in a rodeo competition, to tell him that Jean Arthur wasn't going to die of pneumonia. Or perhaps it was the horse that wasn't going to die, and Jean who came cantering up with the news. Nothing as pitiful as that happened

at the British Film Festival, organised by the *Daily Mail* and held at the Leicester Square Theatre this afternoon. The occasion was mildly interesting because of the mild quality of the six films, bits of which were recited by flesh-and-blood actors into a microphone. There were three resonant speeches by Eric Portman, Anton Walbrook, and Robert Donat, but for the rest I couldn't get up any kind of interest. The music struck me as being of a hopeless mediocrity, so many attempts to improve on Elgar and doing less well than Edward German. And why did they have to trot out that resounding piece of emptiness the *Warsaw* concerto? This was all very well as background music to the film for which it was designed, since it wittily suggested that something in the concert line was going on. As I sat listening I watched my old friend Alec Whittaker tootling away as gravely as though it had been the *New World* symphony. Unless I dreamed, he kept his eyes closed throughout the entire proceedings, but opened them once to wink prodigiously in my direction. The object of the jamboree was the award of a trophy representing "a nation-wide recognition of brilliance in acting and production, based on the judgment expressed voluntarily by the great British cinema-going public." Meaning, I take it, the readers of a particular daily paper. But suppose the result of the *Daily Mail* plebiscite doesn't agree with the recent *Daily Express* plebiscite on the same subject? And suppose the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald* weigh in with more plebiscites? In any case how much judgment has the great British cinema-going public? Enough to choose between Mr A's teeth and Mr B's shoulders, Miss X's ankle and Miss Y's calf. Odd, by the way, that there was no mention of two films which made some stir at the time—*Henry V* and *Cæsar and Cleopatra*!

*March 4 Monday.* I see by the paper that Donald Wolfit has been talking to the Critics' Circle. "Dramatic critics must possess the faculty of keeping young in heart." How old in heart, meaning how worn in mind, does D. W. think Shaw was when he put on the map of this country the greatest dramatist since Molière? And put him wittily on the map?

But the first act of *Rosmersholm* had hardly begun on Monday night, when I recognised, with something like excitement, the true atmosphere of this most enthralling of all Ibsen's works rising like an enchanted mist for the first time on an English stage. There were drawbacks, of course. The shabbiness of the scenery did not

trouble me ; but the library of Pastor Rosmer got on my nerves a little. What on earth did he want, for instance, with *Sell's World's Press* ?

D. W. went on to say that Shaw's criticisms had been brilliant, but he did not think they should be imitated. I cannot think of a time when the London stage had more need of an imitator. Finally D. W. suggested that Clement Scott was a far better pattern for the health of our theatre than the new freeman of Dublin. Meaning, as all actors mean, that the function of the critic is not to dissuade people from seeing twaddle, but to gloss over twaddle in order to pack the people in. Before I was told to take things easy I should have written a full-length letter to Wolfitt telling him my views on what to me is nonsense and why I hold it to be nonsense. But such a letter would have taken me two hours, whereas this Diary entry has taken me ten minutes. Wherefore let it be put on record that to-day I made my first successful attempt to do less work.

*March 5* *Symphonie Fantastique*, at the Curzon, is a bad film *Tuesday*. because the material is not there to make a good one.

Berlioz's life falls into three categories. His music—there is not enough of it in this picture. His unending struggles, and the infinite boredom of the scribbling by which he had to keep himself alive.

I return to my treadmill—journalism—once more, and oh ! the horror of it ! The misery of writing to order an article on nothing in particular—or on things that, as far as I was concerned, simply did not exist since they excited in me no feeling of any description whatsoever.

The film merely hints at this. Last there's the wit ; this film has none. What it does give is the marriage with Henriette Smithson, and the tedious second marriage with Marie Recio. Of Smithson there is very little to tell. When Charles Kean went over to Paris to play Hamlet she was his Ophelia, and a very bad one ; Hazlitt dismisses her in a sentence : " Miss Smithson is tall ; and the French admire tall women." About the second wife there is even less to be said. She was a fool who, to quote Grove, " frequently imperilled the success of her husband's work by insisting on the leading part in its performance." To-day's film showed her as one of those lambent imbeciles who desert an artist at his most need on the plea that it will be good for his art. But there were compensations. The nobility











of art, the power of music, and the compulsion of work—all these were recognised. There was no suggestion of commonness. Even so, there were things in Berlioz's life which could have been done better. Paganini makes one entry after the failure of *Benvenuto Cellini*, when he comes to tell the composer that he has written a work of genius. After which he stalks away like the Ghost in *Hamlet*. How much more dramatic to have reproduced the scene from the Life. It was after a concert at which both the *Symphonie Fantastique* and *Harold in Italy* had been given :

Paganini, with his little son, Achille, appeared at the orchestra door, gesticulating violently. Consumption of the throat, of which he afterwards died, prevented his speaking audibly, and Achille alone could interpret his wishes. He signed to the child, who climbed on a chair and put his ear close to his father's mouth, then, turning to me, he said, "Monsieur, my father orders me to tell you that never has he been so struck by music. He wishes to kneel and thank you." Confused and embarrassed, I could not speak, but Paganini seized my arm, hoarsely ejaculating, "Yes ! Yes !" dragged me into the theatre, where several of my players still lingered—and there knelt and kissed my hand.

Next day Berlioz tells us that he received a letter from the virtuoso enclosing a note for twenty thousand francs. Who would have expected a French film to miss this ? Good performance by Jean-Louis Barrault, and nice to see that the film company includes the composer's name in its list of credits !

*March 6*            In a letter from George Lyttelton :  
*Wednesday.*

By the way, Charles Fry on W. G. as compared with Ranji. How could he judge ? He never saw W. G. before the 'nineties. My father, who often played with the old man in the 'sixties and often saw him in the 'nineties, always said the young W. G. was much better than the old one, and he was no *laudator temporis acti*. Mainly because he was far quicker, which is not surprising, as he was at least six stone lighter.

*March 9*            Last night's *Song of Norway*, at the Palace, was a  
*Saturday.*        glittering horror. Sat up half the night demolishing  
it :

Berlioz, who was punster as well as wit, wrote to Madame Ernst, "On vous demande comment vous avez passé la nuit, jamais comment vous passez l'ennui." Or one might ask, *A quoi*

*rêvent les jeunes filles* as their eyes and ears drink in the enthralling story of how Chopin died of George Sand, and Schubert of mislaid spectacles? To find their answer is easy. They ask why the whole of life should not be light opera, why young ladies should not for ever clasp to their bosoms bunches of *myosotis* presented by blushing cavaliers. But of what do old men dream as they watch the familiar witlessness unfold itself, the critics who could tell you the plot backwards before the curtain goes up, the carpers who think that sumptuousity and glitter should clothe something more than vacuity? Archer's recommendation was sleep. Did some of us, gazing at that handsome backcloth of alp and fiord, murmur something about "night-dews on still waters between walls of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass," and ask ourselves whether the modern poet despises song or just can't sing? Or did we think of that sea in terms of Ibsen? How *Ellida* came from it and little Eyolf fell into it. How the "Indian Girl" sailed over it. How *Peer Gynt* might have been drowned in it. How Captain Alving caroused and made lewd jokes by it. How Oswald Alving braved it when he went to Paris, unless, of course, he took the overland route via St Petersburg and Pskof. Did we add up the number of times anybody in the plays is allowed to eat or drink anything? (Mrs Borkman, who hasn't seen her sister for eight years, doesn't offer her even a cup of tea.) Did we, in the mind's eye, conjure up a vision of the Old Man glaring out of his hedgehogger of whisker in rapt disfavour at the I'm-to-be-Queen-of-the-May frolics and gambollings? Did we, getting back to the matter in hand, cast about for reasons why a composer known to be third-rate—'miniaturist' is a politer word—at the beginning of the evening should be rapidly declining to fifth-rate as the proceedings drag on, and will be seventh-rate before the curtain finally falls? Did we ask why, in the ball scene, six young women should take to dancing Solveig's Song? Or wonder whether six old women would make six teetotums out of the dying Ase? Or make a bet with our neighbour on how long it would be before the waiters handing round the ices lifted up their voices and gave us yet another chunk of that Piano Concerto? And so on. . . .

**March 11** The modern critical dislike of Richard Strauss is becoming  
**Monday.** farcical. Here is the *Times* music critic on the concert given yesterday by the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam :

Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* was chosen—mercifully in preference to *En Heldenleben*—to show the capacity of the orchestra at its full strength.

This opens up a charming field. Presently we shall be reading :

Elgar's *Cockaigne* Overture was chosen—mercifully in preference to *Till Eulenspiegel*—to show the orchestra's sense of wit.

Or :

Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* was chosen—mercifully in preference to *Rosenkavalier*—to show the orchestra's sense of period.

Or even :

Brahms's *Feldeinsamkeit* was chosen—mercifully in preference to *Morgen*—to show the singer's feeling for natural beauty.

*March 12* Falstaff was the cause that wit was in other men. Nobody  
*Tuesday.* can take it from me that I am the cause that people write  
me good letters. I just don't believe that anybody in  
London received three better letters this morning than I did. Here  
they are :

From a sergeant in the Pacific :

NX123658  
Sgt. G. McIntyre  
Legal H.Q. Morotai Force  
Morotai  
Australian Military Forces

DEAR MR AGATE,

This letter is written from the tropical island of Morotai—" the Island of the Dead " to the Indonesians. At present Japanese war criminals are being tried here for offences against us and our Allies.

In a case before the court to-day the men had taken part in the execution of an airman whom they had captured on some island in the Banda Sea. There have been several similar cases, but a new element was introduced this morning.

Kateyama, the accused, has given his evidence. He had been chosen to do this solemn service (the beheading) in honour of those condemned. " In Japanese chivalry, we thought it an honour on behalf of the condemned, not to ourselves. It was my first experience to carry out that solemn but dreadful execution," was part of his plea.

Kateyama speaks English, and claims to be a Christian—a Methodist. He has an Aunt Winnie in Japan. " Aunt Winnie " is an Englishwoman, born in London, and married since 1937 to " Uncle Yamaguchi " of Tokio. When she heard that Kateyama had been arrested as a war criminal she wrote good-character references for him, expounding at length his careful upbringing and expressing belief in his innocence. She added, however, that if he had done wrong he was to be punished. Throughout his evidence he spoke of his " Aunt Winnie " or " Auntie," and much had been made of his good connections.

To-day is February 27, This morning *Ego 7* arrived for me from Australia. Reading it before the afternoon sitting commenced, I reached the entry for 27 February the pronouncement of Austin Melford, "Close those eyes, Geoffrey—close them. Ah, yes, I've murdered him. *What will his aunt in Japan say?*"

It was as a voice from another world, similar to those cases where guidance is sought by plunging a pin into an inspired writing, and extracting an enlightened text. I at once drew the attention of the Prosecutor (whom I am assisting) to the extraordinary circumstances. The Defending Officer was consulted, and the matter brought to the attention of the court. An exhausting discussion followed as to whether your script should be elevated to the status of an inspired pronouncement, or on the other hand, of equal significance, would it be reasonable to regard past pronouncements from inspired sources as no more than coincidental dipping into 'profane' writing?

Opinions were hotly expressed—sacred and profane—and it is now up to the court, in arriving at their verdict, to decide how much weight should be given to the incident—"Karma or Coincidence?"

The implications are far-reaching. In effect, there is the possibility that may arise of a general and legal (International Law) recognition of your *Ego* attaining to and containing (in your lifetime) some mystical significance.

It is a chain of unusual events—your London story 27 February the inclusion in *Ego*, the arrival on Morotai via Sydney on 27 February the execution trial with all its emphasis on his aunt in Japan, and the reading in the atap-roofed court hut at such a moment in all time.

As a consistent and appreciative reader of the *Egos* and other books and essays by you, it gives me much pleasure to bring the facts before you.

Yours sincerely,  
GRANT McINTYRE

Later P.S. The court has just announced its verdict. Kateyama has been found guilty.

G. McI.

Still later P.P.S. The court has just sentenced Kateyama to death by shooting. Congratulations and salutations, Mr Agate, and does it make you feel elevated or frighteningly responsible?

G. McI.

From St John's Wood :

DEAR MR AGATE,

Pursuing and enjoying yet another *Ego*, I am reminded that there once lived in this house an even greater Bernhardt-addict than yourself. She lived here most of her life, and died shortly before we came in 1914.

Miss X always dressed entirely in black, and never went out except when Sarah Bernhardt was in London. She then dressed in undiluted white and sallied forth in a carriage—often visiting the actress, who returned the visits to this house.

Miss X had a box at the theatre, and attended every performance of her goddess; she also sent her one dozen red carnations, every day of the year to whatever part of the world Bernhardt might be in, from the florist in Finchley Road, at the top of this road. The ex-owner, the late Mr Amy, once told me that this order was worth £500 a year to him.

When we came here the garden was full of busts of the Divine Sarah. We had a divine time throwing divine bricks at them, pieces of which still form indispensable parts of our somewhat-less-divine rockery. Creeping Jennie now grows over the noses you both admired so much!

With thanks for much enjoyable reading.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

RONALD T. HORLEY

From C. B. Fry :

1. W. G. was very tall, and long and loose of limb, and when young a large-sized athlete. He was very keen and shrewd and kindly and domineering—except with squires and noblemen. He was rather sheep-faced, vacillating with females, but *very* fond of his wife.

2. In his time wickets were good on the county grounds but *lively*, and the danger was *fast bowling*, and there were a lot of *good* fast bowlers.

When a batsman went in (a top-notcher) he felt that if he could master the fast stuff the rest was easy, comparatively.

3. Now W. G. stood tall, and simply thumped fast bowling all over the place. He didn't *lunge*. He just stood where he was and *pressed* it or leant against it. *And* he was a very clever and safe late cutter, as he was well above even the high rising ball and cut with an almost straight bat rather like a slicing backstroke. He so outplayed all the other bats of his time *at the fast bowling* that *this alone* gave him indisputable and admired eminence.

4. He could play medium pace bowling on good wickets with a toothpick—with his huge reach, fine timing, and lambent eye.

5. Above all he was studiously correct, and he really did watch the ball—*and* it up with his eyes.

6. He never liked good slow bowling as he did fast, and was rather doubtful at good leg-breaks. But he was a magnificent driver both off and on, and when young could jump out to clout the good length ball from the slower bowlers.

7. His body poise was *correct* for the main strokes, but he had

no *nicety and beauty* of poise, no facile adaptability as Ranji had ; nor had he the acrobatic quickness of Don Bradman. Ranji had, and the Don has, a much quicker and more facile power of hand (usually called wrist) that gives acceleration of the stroke just before impact.

8. W. G. was a fine hitter on wet wickets, but not a specially good back player, and he could, or did, not hook—not free enough of foot.

9. W. G. was a tremendous batsman—a giant. But he was conventional, compared with Ranji and the Don.

10. Ranji's virtues were (a) peculiar quickness, (b) lovely supple facile body-poise, (c) brains.

11. W. G. was Cœur-de-lion, Ranji was Saladin (*cf. The Talisman*).

12. W. G.'s fame was as the Champion All-rounder. He was the best change bowler of his time, and worth his place on this count alone in the England XI. That is usually forgotten. His vivid, giant, bearded personality was one reason he was regarded as the nonpareil.

13. The difficulty in these valuations is, in dealing with *evidence*, to distinguish scientific observation and sentiment. W. G. was a beloved national institution and his excellence sacrosanct. He was a terrific big fellow and a great sportsman.

14. By the way, he had immense *stamina*, and could go on batting at full pressure all day.

15. *N.B.* Through all his best seasons in England Ranji had asthma, and often did not sleep till 6 or 7 A.M. He was a marvel.

C. B.

*March 13* Twelve years ago the play made out of James Laver's *Wednesday. Nymph Errant* was a good entertainment. Or perhaps Cole Porter's music and a cast containing Gertrude Lawrence, Norah Howard, Bruce Winston, Morton Selten, Austin Trevor, and my sister May turned it into good entertainment. Tonight's new version, which they call *Evangeline*, seemed to me vulgar tawdry, and silly beyond words. In the middle of the scene in which *Evangeline* (Frances Day) makes her bargain with the slave-dealer an odd thing happened. The stage disappeared, and in its place I beheld a vision, or succession of visions, constituting the new musical play to end all musical plays. First a ball in old Vienna. Brahms, minus his beard, resplendent in the uniform of the Budapest Guards, casts a countess from him, announcing that he is now all for music and the simple life. In the second act B. is wandering in the woods in search of some long-lost Hungarian dances. The third act happens in

a gipsy encampment, bounded on one side by Mohac's Field and on the other by Wardour Street, the distant spire being that of St Mohac-in-the-Fields. To the thrumming of zithers peasants madly dance. Flagons circulate gaily, and copious draughts of yohimbine, penicillin, and M. and B. are consumed. Seated on a log in the foreground is the now fully bearded composer taking it all down in full score. As the curtain falls the Four Serious Songs are being crooned, swung, jazzed, and jived through floodlit loud-speakers. The vision then faded. And as I opened my eyes the Chief Eunuch was lowering Day through a manhole into the Bosphorus.

*March 14 Thursday.* Here's a how-de-do. Here's a state of things. May is naturally anxious to see a reprint of her book on Sarah, and Bertie van Thal, who would like to oblige, can't at the moment because he hasn't the paper, wherefore he seeks my moral and advisory support. The result is a letter from May to me beginning, "Dear Mr Jorkins, I rang up Mr Spenlow yesterday. . . ." To which I have replied, "Dear Agnes Wickfield, must you behave like Dora?" If there is a moral here it is: Never come between a sister and her publisher. May is a great if sometimes masterful dear, and I shall have my revenge by publishing a picture of her at the age of two, fondling a photographer's stuffed seagull.

*March 15 Friday.* Of all the reviews I have ever had of the longer or shorter *Ego* Frank Singleton, of the *Bolton Evening News*, has written the one which has given me the most pleasure:

"The English," says Mr James Agate, "instinctively admire any man who has no talent and is modest about it." He himself presents them with the contrary problem; and though he likes to be admired he makes no concessions to achieve that end. In succeeding volumes of his diary *Ego* he has told us of his extravagances, his debts, his stepping ponies, his friends, and above all the theatre and theatre world in which he is such an outstanding figure. Now he has himself made from this exuberant record *A Shorter Ego*, of which two volumes are published. By doing so Mr Agate has achieved a book which may well fulfil for him that "insane desire," as he calls it, to perpetuate oneself. By contracting his dial, Mr Agate has achieved an improvement like Macaulay's when, after his return from India, there began to be noticeable in the unbroken stream of his conversation "flashes of silence."

It is no good criticising Mr Agate. You must take him as he so generously allows you to find him—on every page, in every

paragraph, take him or leave him for other diversions and consolations in whose existence he will not believe. He offers incomparable entertainment, and it is a dull reader who cannot catch beneath the exuberance the muffled drums of life relentlessly advancing beyond laughter into the unknown. The self-professed egotist can recognise "that timidity of which every man in his heart of hearts knows something." The lover of life is conscious of death approaching. His book will live as one of the most extraordinary records of vitality in the language, and when Mr Agate is really old he can, like the Wife of Bath, be tickled to the roots of his heart to remember that he has had his world as in his day.

*March 16* Last night of *Sweeter and Lower*. Sent Gingold two  
*Saturday.* white camellias, symbolising the blamelessness of her life and mine. Also a letter saying, "Good luck to your next show. Let's hope the first night doesn't take place on the same day as the Regent's Park Van Horse Parade, which I am judging. I should hate to confuse the two." G. wore the flowers in the last scene, and at the end produced my *billet doux* from her corsage and read it to the audience.

*March 17* Reply to an unknown correspondent, telling me that he  
*Sunday.* is the original of Comus in Saki's *The Unbearable Bassington* :

This gives me a real thrill. Munro's masterpiece is one of my favourite bed-books. *I never tire of it*. But can you have been so enchantingly impossible? I doubt it. And I am certain that H. H. never said when you, an officer, invited him, a corporal, to dine in your mess, "Between you and I now is a great gulf fixed." But then I don't believe that Abraham said to a certain rich man, "Between *we* and you there is a great gulf fixed." Saki's Comus would have found it a pleasure as well as a duty to expose this howler. The person he would most have liked to abash in public? His potential patron, Sir Julian Jull, of course. Again, I just can't believe that you didn't die in that West African swamp. "His epitaph in the mouths of those that remembered him would be: Comus Bassington, the boy who never came back." Since no man can contradict his epitaph you must be bogus, a fake, an impostor. But an impostor I should much like to meet in the flesh. Will you lunch with me on any date you like to name at the Ivy Restaurant, 1.30? I'll invite the ghosts of Francesca, Ada Spelvexit, Lady Caroline Benaresque, Elaine de Frey, and Courtenay Youghal. Apart from these, all the haunt shall be ours. And, of course, Saki's. In the meantime I start to-night re-reading the book for the seventh time. Which is one more than Stevenson with *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*.



*March 18 Monday.* Lunched at the Ivy with George Lyttelton and Edward D. Johnson. The latter told us that his seventh great-grandfather and Dr Johnson's grandfather were the same person. He brought with him a facsimile of the First Folio and staggered us. At the end of the afternoon I made him, so to speak, a present of his ciphers, the point being that while they prove Bacon to have had a great hand in the plays they do nothing to disprove Shakespeare's part in them. As G. L. put it, "Nothing that anybody can show me will make me believe that Bacon wrote 'Come unto these yellow sands.'"

*March 19 Tuesday.* About Baconians in general I feel that if they could force on the world recognition of Bacon's authorship of Shakespeare's plays they wouldn't mind if the works disappeared to-morrow. Whereas Shakespeareans love the plays for their own sake, and take no more than an amused interest in who wrote them. At least that is my position. And I shan't budge.

*March 20 Wednesday.* To satisfy reviewers clamouring for a more personal *Ego* I throw them this, being a detailed account of last night's doings :

- 11.30 P.M. Arrive home.
- 11.40 P.M. Two tablets of Veganin to stop toothache, since the dentist wants a morning and I haven't one to spare.
- 11.50 P.M. Bisodol to correct evening's indiscretions.
- 12.0 A.M. Inhale Riddobron against asthma.
- 12.10 A.M. Dessert-spoonful of bicarbonate of soda.
- 12.20 A.M. Dose of Pulmo (lung tonic).
- 12.30 A.M. Ephedrine tabloid and inhale Riddobron again.
- 12.40 A.M. Capsule of Adexolin (Vitamins A and B) and tablet of Redoxon (Vitamin C).
- 12.50 A.M. Open bottle of whiskey and box of cigars.
- 1.0 A.M. Set about first draft of *S.T.* article on last night's play, Paul Vincent Carroll's *The Wise Have Not Spoken*.
- 2.0 A.M. Two liver pills, and resume work till
- 4.0 A.M. Bed, where I take sleeping tablets and cough till 5.0.
- 8.30 A.M. Open letter from George Lyttelton beginning, "It was delightful to find you in such good form, triumphing with contemptuous ease over all the bodily betrayals of which Nature is so lavish as the years pile up."

**March 21**      Diarising by time-table rather appeals to me. Here  
**Thursday.**      is my day :

- 9.0 A.M.      Cough till
- 10.0 A.M.      Pull *S.T.* article into shape and go on pulling till
- 1.30 P.M.      Lunch at the French Embassy.
- 3.0 P.M.      Preside at Council Meeting of Hackney Horse Society.
- 5.0 P.M.      Write entirely fresh *S.T.* article.
- 7.0 P.M.      Stare at revue at Duchess Theatre.
- 9.30 P.M.      Café Royal, where a total stranger comes up to me :  
                  T. S. How do you think the theatre of this war  
                  compares with the theatre of the last war ?  
                  J. A. I'm afraid that would take a lot of answer-  
                  ing.  
                  T. S. Quite. What do you think of the American  
                  invasion of the English stage ?  
                  J. A. That too is a complicated question.  
                  T. S. Well, what do you think about a National  
                  Theatre ? You must have some views about *that*.  
                  J. A. Some other time, perhaps. I'm afraid I'm  
                  too tired to go into all that now.  
                  T. S. Of course. At your age . . .  
                  (*The young man goes back to his seat, and*  
                  *J. A. hears him say to his friends,*  
                  *"Gosh, that's a bore !"*)
- 11.30 P.M.      Another go at *S.T.* article.
- 3.30 A.M.      Bed.

**March 22**      One of the marks of greatness is the power to rise to  
**Friday.**      the occasion plus the knowledge of which occasions are  
                 worth rising to.

**March 23**      *Winged Words :*  
**Saturday.**

No. 7 : Edward Molyneux made my frock when I remarried  
it expressed exactly the right note of sophistication, sentimental  
regret for an early mistake (on my part !), and happy confidence  
in the future.

*Paris Correspondent in smart illustrated paper*

No. 8 : *Antony and Cleopatra* is not Shakespeare's greatest  
play, but it is perhaps the finest exemplar of his "negative  
capability."

*Programme of the Marlowe Society, Cambridge*

**March 24**      My stuff about Paul Vincent Carroll's *The Wise Have Not*  
**Sunday.**      *Spoken* reads fairly well, I think. The trouble I had with  
                 it was due to the old difficulty Walkley noted, that of  
writing an orderly article round a muddled play. *Shadow and*

*Substance* was a muddle ; the new piece is worse. Who are the wise ? And what would they say if they opened their mouths ? How will shooting at the police make a farm pay ? Will the soil benefit by an increase of spiritual awareness in the tillers ? Why are half the family lunatics, not in the metaphorical, but in the literal sense of being certified imbeciles, taken away to a madhouse ? Jock Dent was gammoned to the extent of saying the play is " much too good for the West End." (The comparison, I take it, is with the nitwit farces about American adolescence.) In my view Carroll's piece isn't good enough for any End. It is a play of ideas which have nothing to do with each other and are not related to any central theme. When Hilda Wangel waves her shawl because her idealism has killed her old architect you may think she is an interfering hussy, but you realise that she has made her point—that it is better for the old to cease to live than cease to dare. That is Ibsen's play in a nutshell, and any play of ideas which won't go into a nutshell is not a good play of ideas. Jock seems to take up the position of Shaw's parson-burglar, who liked expounding a doctrine that was beautiful and subtle and exquisitely put together. " I may feel instinctively that it is the rottenest nonsense. Still, if I can get a moving dramatic effect out of it my gift takes possession of me and obliges me to sail in and do it." I rear up when a moving and dramatic play turns out, on analysis, to be nonsense. Jock is of the opposite school. He has always hated argument outside the theatre as well as inside. Whereas I love argument, everywhere. When a man, be he schoolmaster or playwright, produces a piece of chalk and on a blackboard sets down this sum in simple addition

$$\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ 3 \\ \hline 7 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

I just say " Fudge ! " And I don't care how exquisitely the figures are made or how strikingly the board is posited on its easel.

*March 25* Letter from a Scotch lassie :  
*Monday.*

I have no priceless first edition for you, no link with Boswell, no thing of Sarah's. A random reader, an indiscriminating play-goer, and with but little music in my soul, I must seem a curious correspondent. And so I am. It isn't admiration—you're not

that good. It isn't criticism—I'm not that good. And it is most certainly not a 'crush'—you look a bull-necked, bad-tempered sort of person. Since I'm not even a customer, being library-fed, how dare I push my dull pen under your busy notice? A favour—to be sure. Please, Mr Agate, don't die for a very long time.

You see, I have just discovered you and am journeying joyfully through the *Egos*. You have become a pleasant comfort in my life—like old tweeds or a husband or a favourite chair—not exciting or important, but something to look forward to and hurry back to after the day's work. I deeply love London, and you are very much of it. I visit it periodically, *femme de province* that I am, for a whole week at a time—stay at the Club—do some shows—buy a silly hat and pretend I am somebody. I stand for a moment in Piccadilly, my eyes tight shut, and look at yesterday's glories—then spend an hour in Bond Street, the eyes wide open, looking for to-morrow's bargains (I am a compatriot of Jock's). I hover round old houses, refurnishing them with Regency ladies. I walk with Walpole, I picture Pepys, and fain would add Agate.

Too Scotchly shy to ask you to drink a dish of tea with me at my "kennel in St James's Street" when I come for my week's wallow at Easter, I shall seek out this Ivy place and maybe see you passing by. Having given you the Freedom of my special London, I am anxious to know how you look in it—but—*alive*—please!

*March 26* I sat at the Thirty Club dinner to Arthur Rank between *Tuesday*. the Editors of the *Express* and the *Tatler*. The speeches were in the following order: Chairman, Arthur Rank, J. A., Robert Donat, Beverley Baxter, John Mills. Seized the occasion to attack combines. Asked whether the world of thought would be richer if some millionaire were able to buy up *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Birmingham Daily Post*, the *Yorkshire Post*, the *Scotsman*, and the *Glasgow Herald*. Enlarged on this and theatrical monopoly. Suggested that union is weakness, since it means regimentation of thought, and where you have that you cannot have freedom of opinion. Said we must compose ourselves to the Rank situation, since to that situation we had come. And I concluded:

I do not attack, and have no intention of attacking, directly or by any kind of insinuation or innuendo, the commercial cinema. The business of entertainment is one thing and the pursuit of an art is another. It would be nice if 'the pictures' and the art of the screen were as inseparable as Abbott and Costello. But they are not. They can be separated, with honour to each. No wise man would say that an artistic picture must not be produced because it is not a money-maker. And similarly, no wise man would ban a money-making picture on the ground that it is not

intellectual. Was *The Wicked Lady* designed to titillate the ears of the groundlings? But Nature has given the groundlings ears, and they are entitled to have them titillated. I do not attack Mr Rank or his companies. Economic and political conditions doubtless demand that this country opposes to Hollywood's nincompoopery British nincompoopery of equal competence. I wish these commercial films well, and am happy that the British forces who make them are under the command of a general whose integrity, enterprise, and acumen are beyond dispute. But let Mr Rank take a tip from the publishing trade. It is a fact that every publisher of any pretensions to a name makes a point of putting out one good work a year knowing that he will lose money by it. Possibly not for love of that good work; and certainly to maintain his imprint. But at least he does it. Let Mr Rank devote one of his many studios to pictures as good as the modern French and Russian pictures, and the German pictures in the days of Ufa. Let him devote one-fiftieth of his power and resources and floor-space to first-rate films without regard to what they gross. I shall be glad to sit on the board of any such unit, and without remuneration. I doubt whether this is more than an empty figure of speech. I do not believe that Mr Rank will listen to me. No film magnate has ever listened to me in all the twenty-five years I have been pouring out advice. As the schoolmistress says in the film of *The Corn is Green*, "I have worn my fingers to the bone knocking my brains against a stone wall." Let me go back to this question of pictures that pay and pictures that are works of art. To be quite sure that I had made no mistake about the quality of *The Wicked Lady* I went to Camden Town the other evening to have another look. I was told that the queue extended to Swiss Cottage. It was useless to go on to Swiss Cottage, where the film was also showing, since that queue extended to Camden Town. I see no harm in this. There are millions of people all over the country who will be as much moved by this film as I am by *Hamlet*. This rubbish has its place in the scheme of things, and Mr Rank is entitled to purvey it. But let him do what I ask and set one good film against forty-nine money-makers. Always in the knowledge that there is no law of Nature which says that all good films must lose money. The law is that certain kinds of bad films will always make a great deal of money. My offer, then, is plain. Let Mr Rank accept it and he is my friend for life, and the *Tatler* will fill its glossiest page with his praises. If not, he is my enemy, and has yet to learn the number of ways in which I can track him down, ambush him, and lure him to his doom.

*March 28* Letter from Accident Insurance Company asking how  
*Thursday.* my health is in view of my age. Have replied that I can still see well enough not to walk into the fire, and hear well enough not to cross the street in front of a fire-engine. That I

have enough asthma to stop me worrying about my nerves, and sufficient bronchitis to keep my mind off my heart. That I should be disquieted by a certain puffiness suggesting dropsy were it not compensated by some promising twinges of gout.

*March 29* Sean O'Casey has once again gone too far, and on Sunday *Friday*. I propose in the *S.T.* to take his trousers down and spank him :

In the course of an article entitled "The People and the Theatre," which appears in the first issue of *Theatre To-day*, Mr O'Casey writes :

"The critics, instead of being stout and indubitable guides to where there are swans, invariably (as far as new work is concerned) lead the people to where there is naught but a gaggle of geese. . . . Whenever has a London critic, with clamour and encouragement, furnished the English stage with a new and first-class playwright, from at home or abroad ?"

This is "piffle before the wind," and I propose to be the wind. (If my citations are taken from one newspaper it is because the *Sunday Times* is the most convenient of access.) Noel Coward, *The Vortex* : "Brains must ultimately come by their own, even in the theatre ; and Mr Coward has brains to spare." Jean-Jacques Bernard, *The Unquiet Spirit* : "One of the most beautiful plays in the last fifty years." Ronald Mackenzie, *Musical Chairs* : "I have seen this play twice, and am now ready to burn my boats about it. It is, in my view, the best first play written by any English playwright during the last forty years." J. B. Priestley, *Dangerous Corner* : "If this play does not take the town it will be the town's fault. In Mr Priestley we have an obviously first-class playwright in the making. If adequate encouragement is not forthcoming and Mr Priestley should decide not to go on with the job, the public will have only itself to blame." Rodney Ackland, *After October* : "If the playgoer has one grain of playgoing sense to rub against another he will be entranced." Clifford Odets, *Paradise Lost* : "This failure is better value for money, dramatically, emotionally, and in the scale of pure entertainment, than all of London's current successes put together." And what but the excitement of two critics on seeing the MS. of Peter Ustinov's *House of Regrets* secured a production of this first play ? Will Mr O'Casey still refuse to see "clamour and encouragement" in the foregoing, which I could multiply a hundred times ?

Now let me go back to the year . . . At the Royalty Theatre in November of that year London had its first glimpse of a new play by a young Irishman. The critic of the *Sunday Times* began his notice with a reference to Henry Morley's discovery that "the English temper jibs at undiluted tragedy. Whether for good or

ill, the English audience, says Morley, has a habit of looking out for something upon which to feed its appetite for the absurd. The orthodox writer of melodrama satisfies that hunger with a comic under-plot, and by so doing 'saves his terrors whole.' " The critic then described the plot of the new piece, which he called " the work of a master." And the notice ended, " This is a great play, in which both educated and uneducated will see any amount of that fun which Morley declared to be our heritage." Six months later the same critic was writing of this new playwright's next play, " This piece contains that greatness which is something different from the sum of small perfections. . . . Mr O'Casey has done what Balzac and Dickens did—he has created an entirely new gallery of living men and women."

In view of the foregoing does the author of *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars* still complain of lack of clamour and encouragement? He cannot, unless words do not mean to him what they mean to the rest of us. No, readers, I am not peeved. I make no moan about serpents' teeth and thankless playwrights. Ingratitude will not vanquish me. I shall go on praising plays that seem to me good, and damning those that seem to me bad. And so will the entire body of critics. Why, then, make a fuss about an obvious case of ill-temper? Because Mr O'Casey is a great man of the theatre, and the errors and inaccuracies of great men call for refutation before the prestige of their begetters gives them a validity they do not possess.

*April 2 Tuesday.* A chink in the Shavian armour. Henry Wood once said that he never conducted any piece, however familiar, without running through the score an hour or two before the performance. I should not dream of going to see an Ibsen play without having a look at what Shaw and Archer had had to say. In the case of the big Shakespeares I do much the same thing. Before to-night's Valk-Wolfit battle I looked up G. B. S. on Wilson Barrett's *Othello*. Magnificent, of course—I mean the criticism. But I also found in the same article a passage which shows the Great Man at his critical worst. He is writing about Janet Achurch in *Antony and Cleopatra* :

On Monday last she was sweeping about, clothed with red Rossettian hair and beauty to match; revelling in the power of her voice and the steam pressure of her energy; curving her wrists elegantly above Antony's head as if she were going to extract a globe of goldfish and two rabbits from behind his ear; and generally celebrating her choice between the rare and costly art of being beautifully natural in lifelike human acting, like Duse, and the comparatively common and cheap one of being theatrically beautiful in heroic stage exhibition:

What G. B. S. *subconsciously* felt was that he preferred looking at Duse in *The Lady from the Sea* to Achurch in Shakespeare's *A. and C.* Feeling this way, his normally acute mind got itself tangled up and demanded that Janet should model her playing of Shakespeare's Queen on Duse's Ibsenite and fishy lady! And then my mind started working. "A globe of goldfish and two rabbits." What was the echo here? And then I remembered a "Lost Lecture" by Maurice Baring, the one entitled *Actors, Actresses, and Goldfish*. I turned this up and presently found:

It may be doubted whether the reason Duse's high dreams never came true was not that they could not come true, and whether perhaps the Roman and all other publics were not right to prefer her in Sardou and truncated Ibsen and Pinero, than if she had acted Greek plays, Shakespeare, and poetical dramas written for her by highbrow Italians. I believe myself she was not a tragedian, that she was not of the race of Mrs Siddons; that she could not compare with Sarah Bernhardt in the interpretation of poetic drama; when you saw her in something domestically dramatic you thought how wonderful she would be in Shakespeare, but when she did play Cleopatra the part swamped her, and you thought that she was a charming little Italian dressing up as a queen.

What do I want to prove? That Duse was not a genius? NO. That genius of one kind must not be compared with genius of another? YES. Let me be quite clear about this. There are parts in which goldfish must be produced and juggled with in view of the audience, and parts in which they must be swallowed in the dressing-room one hour before the performance with an eye to that indigestion which the audience will mistake for soul. Let me insist, for the hundredth time, that Duse could no more tear down the ceiling than Sarah could sit about moping. And that it was no fault in one actress not to succeed in the manner of the other. But to go back to Janet. Why did G. B. S. blame her for not being "beautifully natural" as the serpent of Old Nile, and what would he have said if some other critic had blamed Duse for not tantrumising?

*April 4*           Lunched with George Robey, his wife and her mother.  
*Thursday.*       Asked George to settle the question of priority as  
                      between Vesta Tilley and Marie Lloyd. He said, "I should put Marie first. She had to create it all out of herself, whereas Tilley had her wonderful masculine props to rely on. But they were both tremendous artists, and it's a very near thing." About the men of his time he said, "Dan Leno first. After him Tom Costello,



Harry Randall, Little Tich, Chirgwin, Eugene Stratton, Will Fyffe." He was in great form, and told us how some dusky potentate had bestowed a diamond bracelet on his wife and kissed him. "I think he liked me best."

*April 5* If Duvivier, or any good French director, had been in  
*Friday.* charge of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (Empire)

I imagine that on the first day of shooting he would have assembled his cast, taken one look at the husband, and said, "Send for Michel Simon!" I have never forgotten the performance given by this great French actor in the French version of this film. I imagine that D. would then have turned to the wife and said, "Miss Turner, don't you realise that you are supposed to be a little slut who married the greasy owner of a sandwich joint because nothing better offered? That you have been peeling onions and scrubbing pans for the past three years? That your nails are ragged and broken? That your frocks are crumpled and dirty? That only a hobo would desire you? Why, then, do you look as though you had just won a beauty competition for bathing belles? Get off the set and go swimming with Johnnie Weissmuller!" And as for John Garfield: "You're a nice boy, and your sports shirt is highly becoming. What about scoring that try for Yale?" I believed every word of the book and every word of the film when it was made in French and called *Le Dernier Tournant*. At the Empire to-night I didn't believe anything at all. Nor, to judge by the ripples of laughter in the audience, did anybody else believe any of it very much. Not all the might, power, and majesty of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, plus the suavity of my old friend Sam Eckman, plus the redoubtable MacPherson eyeglass—not any of these things, taken singly or all together, is going to make me believe that any young woman can go through a complicated murder, including a motor-crash over a hundred-foot cliff and a hundred-foot climb back, without getting at least one speck of dust on a confection whose immaculacy would make Persil blush.

*April 6* Letter to George Lyttelton :  
*Saturday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,  
Prison looms! The Income Tax people want £1057 4s. 6d. on

Tuesday morning. They won't take no deniging. I haven't got this or anything like it, and shan't have another £1057 4s. 6d. on July 1, or anything like that either. If the specialist who asked me recently if I could go to live in South Africa had said Brixton the answer would have been in the affirmative. What is worrying me is whether I shall be allowed my asthma cigarettes and "squizzer," my private name for the spray which enables me to breathe. In the winter I am helpless without this. But "sumer is icumen in," and if incarceration impends it will be during the next few months.

The first thing I see on looking at my *News Chronicle* this morning, is the heading "Home Office to Train Girl for Ballet." Why, then, does not this enlightened Home Office see that your humble servant can only do his work on whiskey at £4 a bottle, cigars at 7s. 6d., and transport at 15s. a mile? That these things are to him what coffee was to Balzac? I have cut out champagne; the rest are my irreducible minimum. But to pretend that I am happy about all this is nonsense. Do you realise that if I were to drop down dead this minute I shouldn't have a ha'penny to leave to anybody? Even my cuff-links would be forfeit!

Sitting chin-sunken about this at the Café Royal last night, I was violently slapped on the back by a total stranger, who said, "I understand you were a great friend of old B——. He died in my arms. How are *you*?"

(At this point in my diarising a middle-aged Jew whom I don't know pushes past the houseboy and insists on seeing me. "My name is Baumgarten. I vork for the tailor vot repairs your suits. Vot do I vish? I vish that you should help my wife, who shall go on the stage. . . .")

Would you like to read a short story about a form-master who made up his mind to murder his wife? On the theory that there is safety in numbers he poisoned the lemonade of a group of parents gathered round his wife and watching the Old Boys' cricket match. Everybody died, nobody suspected anybody, the coroner was happy, and presently the form-master was promoted to head-master. The author of this, a Mr Neil Bell, says in his preface: "A novelist hardly works at all: once he has learned his trade it is the easiest and pleasantest occupation imaginable, and to pretend that it is hard and exhausting work is simply not true: and the better seller you are the less work you need do: one novel (a couple of months' pleasant occupation) a year will keep you handsomely. The rest of the year you can play. . . ." I see. Hardy wrote *Tess* in eight weeks, and spent the rest of the year folk-dancing in Wessex!

Sorry to keep on drooling, but I've got to quieten my nerves somehow, and choose you rather than drink. Did you see somebody's suggestion the other day that Tchegov's *Cherry Orchard* should be transplanted to the South of Ireland? "Varvara would

become Babs." Monstrous ! I entirely agree with George Moore's "All proper names, no matter how unpronounceable, must be rigidly adhered to ; you must never transpose versts into kilometres, or roubles into francs ; I don't know what a verst is or what a rouble is, but when I see the words I am in Russia."

(Three-quarters of an hour taken up here by film director—I had forgotten the appointment—wanting me to help him cast Paula Tanqueray in a film of the old play. I tell him to run away and not bother me with the impossible. The film public insists on a name and a face, and I insist on a woman with talent and the right sort of talent. Finally I recommend three actresses, on the understanding that all of them put together won't be worth Mrs Pat's little finger. As for our whey-faced screen ninnies, I tell the director I'd rather see a milk pudding act. And he agrees.)

I hope you didn't miss the story of the middle-aged woman who, in Lincoln Cathedral the other day, cried out in a loud voice, "I denounce Magna Carta. It is a relic, and relics are denounced in the Bible." 'Mr F.'s aunt all over again. And then they say that Dickens exaggerated !

And now I must shut up. I began this letter in a "Beggared Outcast" state of depression. I end it looking for a coach and a bag of walnuts. Am due to make a speech to-night at the Savage Club dinner, Mark Hambourg in the chair, and have no doubt at all but that I shall be in riotous spirits.

Yours ever,

JAMES AGATE

*April 7 Sunday.* On a Saturday night at the beginning of the year a young Canadian airman came up to me and asked if he might say how much he admired . . . I said no he mightn't, and what was he doing in London ? He was flying back to Canada on the following Tuesday, and had wangled week-end leave by telling his C.O. a fib. What fib ? Well, that he was in pictures, and had some business to fix up. I said, "With that face you *are* in pictures. Go away now and meet me at one o'clock to-morrow at the Café Royal, where I'll get a woman to look you over." Next day Gwen Chenhalls took one look and signalled O.K. Between us we persuaded Angus McBean to open his studio, where Gwen took him for a sitting while I went on to my concert. Over lunch the young man had told us that his parents wanted him to go into real estate, but that he was all for a film career, here in Britain and not in Hollywood. That they would let him return to London *to a job*, but not just to look for one. So I got busy. Alec Clunes, on seeing the photographs, said, "Why didn't

I have a face like that to play Hamlet with ! " And went on : " *If the boy does come over he can walk on at the Arts Theatre until he finds his feet.*" M.-G.-M. were encouraging, but said they would have no floor-space for seven months. I then decided to tackle Rank, on the theory that any man who controls millions must have imagination. I wrote a short letter and enclosed a photograph, which, I suggested, showed something of Charles Boyer with a dash of Ray Massey. I vouched for the boy's fluidity of temperament : " It's a safe bet he can either act now or be made to later on." And I ended with a demand for a contract !! Next day the telephone rang, and I was informed that a contract for six months at something above a living wage was in the post. This was on Thursday last. I cabled the boy's parents on receipt of the message, and this morning received a reply : " George sailing on the *Aquitania* on the 15th." The young man's name is George Calderwood. But we can alter that.

*April 8* Three letters.

*Monday.* From Neville Cardus saying he has met a fifteen-year-old girl in Sydney who wants to go on the stage. " She is a Czech, and for the last few years has been interned in Java. I have never seen her act."

From a young woman in Cardiff. " Can you tell me of anyone who will give sound criticism to a would-be poet for a very moderate charge ? I say ' moderate,' since I have received several estimates, none of which is under half a guinea. . . ."

From my brother-in-law in Surrey. " I can get three loads of poultry manure for the loan of one of your *Egos*."

*April 9* Wrote again to Arthur Rank :

*Tuesday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR MR RANK,

First let me thank you for your courtesy and consideration in the matter of George Calderwood. I cabled him, and received the reply that he sails in the *Aquitania* on the 15th of this month. He will report to Mr Henley immediately on arrival.

In view of our meeting on the 16th, to which I am looking forward with great pleasure, I think perhaps it would help if I clarified the position by telling you exactly where I stand with regard to British films. As an income-tax payer I am obviously delighted when films can be exported against dollars. As a critic

I hold that that is outside my province. *I am not interested in what any picture grosses, or whether it is exportable.* My concern is with the making of some British pictures so good that educated audiences abroad will want to have them in the way that educated audiences here want to have the best French films.

I don't suppose that there will be any time, or that you will want to discuss this, on the 16th. Nevertheless, I should like to put a few things before you in a friendly and non-controversial spirit. I don't think we can compete with Hollywood just by spending money. For the good reason that at the moment we haven't the talent to spend it on. A film director called on me the other day and asked me to help him cast Paula Tanqueray in a film of Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*. I just had to tell him that the English screen doesn't possess a Paula, for the reason that it has no film actresses who can look forty, and convey good breeding and a sense of moving habitually in a drawing-room in contradistinction to putting on a lot of period clothes and being photographed in a studio.

Since none of our screen actresses can play anything except adolescents there is obviously not a Paula among them. Whereas in America one would cast Bette Davis, Greer Garson, and half a dozen other mature actresses. On the male side we have some good-looking young men, all of whom smack more or less of the suburban lawn-tennis club. Not a bad thing to smack of, but not the stuff of great acting. We just haven't got anybody like—taking a few names at random—Spencer Tracy, Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, William Bendix.

But there is one kind of film which we in this country, with our less individualistic talent, can do better than anybody else. This is the semi-documentary—films like *The Way Ahead* and *The Captive Heart*. These depend not on stars, but on teamwork, at which our actors are very good indeed. Actors like Mervyn Johns, Gordon Jackson, Jimmy Hanley. And there are youngsters coming on. I know of one boy-actor of genius. This is David O'Brien, who, at the age of fourteen, put up a marvellous performance in *To-morrow the World*, which ran for over a year. This child is now at Stratford, where he is to play two parts. But his life is heading for tragedy, and he knows it; *he knows he will be worn out before he is twenty*. I have shown horses most of my life, and I know that if you show a three-year-old more than three or four times you will break his heart, and you will have no horse at six. Now I ask you to believe that this boy has at least six times the talent of Freddie Bartholomew at his best. It seems to me that it is the duty of the film industry, when it hears of something that may be genius, to have a look at that genius, and try it out, and, if it sees promise, nurse it. Arrangements should be made with young O'Brien's parents to send that kid to school, and for the next four years cut down his acting to a maximum of three months a year. For the rest of the time let him study and get fresh air

and grow ! Why not look up the film *No Greater Glory* and see if a remake of this wonderful film would suit this boy ? I do not think this country is bankrupt in the way of talent. I believe it is there if it is looked for. And I believe also that we are not doing the best by the talent we have.

I hope you will absolve me from impertinence and credit me with the best motives in all this. It has seemed to me that no purpose is going to be served by two people meeting without each having some idea of the other's point of view. To put it in a sentence. I hold there is no future for British pictures if we devote all our energy to the hopeless task of beating Hollywood at its own game. But that there is a great future before the cinema industry of this country if we can convince intelligent picturegoers abroad that there are some ways in which, when we like, we can lead the world. I want to see a cinema in London for British post-war, post-documentary pictures as good as those showing at the Curzon, the Academy, Studio One, the Rialto, the Tatler in Charing Cross Road, and the Carlton in Tottenham Court Road.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

*April 10*      Out of devilment I added a P.S. to Sunday's article on  
*Wednesday.*   the Valk-Wolfit set-to in *Othello*.

P.S. On the assumption that Bacon had a good deal to do with this play. How the old boy must have chuckled when he thought of this sentence in the essay "Of Suspicion"—"There is nothing makes a man suspect much, more than to know little ; and therefore men should remedy suspicion by procuring to know more, and not to keep their suspicions in smother"—and realised that it was precisely the following of this advice which led to Othello's downfall. "Be sure thou prove . . ." "Give me the ocular proof . . ." "Make me to see't . . ." "Give me a living reason . . ." But for following Bacon's advice Shakespeare's Moor could have slept on both ears content with his "I do not think but Desdemona's honest." Similarly Shakespeare's Hamlet would have dispatched his uncle and reigned in Denmark if he had not taken Bacon's tip and remembered that "boldness is a child of ignorance and baseness." What about a book going through the essays and plays and showing that Shakespearean catastrophe is invariably the result of paying attention to Bacon ? And on whose side would such a book be ?

Whereupon somebody weighs in this morning with a long argument to prove (?) that the whole of the great scene in which Iago begins to sow suspicion in Othello's mind—the scene beginning "Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady, Know of your love ?"—was based on Bacon's essay "Of Cunning."

*Essay "Of Cunning"*

It is a point of cunning to wait upon him with whom you speak with your eye. . . .

The *breaking off* in the midst of that one was about to say, as if he took himself up, breeds a greater appetite in him with whom you confer, to know more.

I knew another, that when he came to have speech, he would pass over that that he intended most; and go forth and come back again, and speak of it as a thing that he had almost forgot.

All this is admittedly taken from the learned Dr Charles Creighton's book entitled *An Allegory of "Othello"* (1912). But *Othello* was first acted in 1604, and Bacon's essay was not published till 1612. Further, *Othello* was not published till 1622. Whence we are to argue, I suppose, that Bacon in this play put into practice precepts he was not to lay down for another eight years. Alternatively that this scene was not in the spoken play, but written in after the essay came out!! But wait a minute. The essay itself has a curious history. "In the edition of 1625, it is four times as long as in that of 1612, but the opening paragraph of fifteen lines is exactly the same in both, and the closing paragraph is also the same, except that the last three lines of 1612 are transferred in 1625: the whole difference is that an intermediate section of some ninety lines is omitted from the first printing, or interpolated in the second. This is the section which contains the artifices of Iago and Edmund. It consists of eighteen specific points, which are introduced as 'the small wares of cunning.'

*"Othello"*

IAGO. Wear your eye thus, not jealous, nor severe.  
(*Showing him how.*)

OTH. And, for I know thou art full of love and honesty,  
And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath,  
Therefore, these *stops of thine* fright me the more:  
For such things in a false disloyal knave  
Are tricks of custom.

OTH. Leave me, Iago.

IAGO. My lord, I take my leave.

IAGO (*returning*). My lord, I would I might entreat your honour

To scan this thing no further. . . .

Note if your lady strain his entertainment

With any strong or vehement importunity;

Much will be seen in that.

Those are the illustrations of the general principles, so that the essay in its originally printed form (1612) was, in a sense, complete without them. Probably the illustrations, being so many as they are, were collected from time to time, and not completed until long after the general principles." I see. The illustrations were not complete enough for the first printing of the essay (1612), *but complete enough for the first production of the play* (1604). Fantastic !!

*April 11 Thursday.* A literary day. Begin by telling *Express* readers that the writers of the so-called poetic drama are not going to gammon me :

Not having seen Miss Anne Ridler's *The Shadow Factory*, I hold it improper for me to say what I think of it as drama. Having read it, I permit myself to pass an opinion on it as poetry. An artist and the director of a factory are discussing the use of the loud-speaker. The director says :

It isn't popular, I'll admit.  
Even the Unions opposed it at first :  
But I stood out for it ; I can't afford to lose it.  
You know the advertising maxim :  
Make your point by repetition,  
Never mind the irritation.  
I find it invaluable. Piece-work, for instance :  
That's unpopular now, you see,  
But after a month of the slogan you heard  
I shall expect a world of difference.  
But to return to our main affair :  
I'm sure we can come to a suitable agreement.

I'm sorry, but I cannot regard this as poetry. And if a play by a poet is as good as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* put together, with *King Lear* thrown in, and *all the poetry thrown out*, I should still decline to see it. Them's my prejudices, them is.

Later am approached by distinguished dilettante, and the following conversation ensues :

D. D. I am collecting material for a book on Alfred Douglas as Poet. Would you like to contribute a chapter saying why you consider him the greatest master of the sonnet since Shakespeare ?

J. A. No.

D. D. Why ?

J. A. Because he isn't.

D. D. Would you like to amplify that ?

J. A. Certainly. Strip Milton and undress Wordsworth, set out their matter in prospectus English, and the world is still richer for a great thought. Take the clothes off Douglas, and nothing remains.



D. D. D'you think that's important ?

J. A. Very.

D. D. Don't you think that Douglas gave the 'nineties poise and significance ?

J. A. What has that to do with Shakespeare ?

Some day I must write an article about the excessive insistence on period scenery and costume both in stage plays and on the screen. Stage producers and film directors seem unable to grasp that a modern audience looking at the revival or screening of a famous play should not be more preoccupied with the settings and the costumes than the audience on the original first-night was preoccupied. *Unless, of course, the play will not stand up to revival on its own merits.* Went to-night to the Curzon to see the revival of *La Bête Humaine*. Did anybody notice that the clothes were not strictly 1890 ? That the engine was not the type that Lantier drove fifty-six years ago ? That the carriages were the best the P-L-M boasted in 1937, or whenever the film was made ? No, nobody noticed these things because Zola's story still stands up as a story of to-day. Arrived home, I took down *L'Assommoir*, which I have always regarded as a masterpiece. (I can only assume that people who claim this for *The Lost Week-end* haven't any French.) Here, for the sheer pleasure of copying it out, is the ending. Gervaise has died at long last :

Mais la vérité était qu'elle s'en allait de misère, des ordures et des fatigues de sa vie gâtée. Elle creva d'avachissement, selon le mot des Lorilleux. Un matin, comme ça sentait mauvais dans le corridor, on se rappela qu'on ne l'avait pas vue depuis deux jours ; et on la découvrit déjà verte, dans sa niche.

Justement, ce fut le père Bazouge qui vint, avec la caisse des pauvres sous le bras, pour l'emballer. Il était encore joliment souül, ce jour-là, mais bon zig tout de même, et gai comme un pinson. Quand il eut reconnu la pratique à laquelle il avait affaire, il lâcha des réflexions philosophiques, en préparant son petit ménage.

— Tout le monde y passe. . . . On n'a pas besoin de se bousculer, il y a de la place pour tout le monde. . . . Et c'est bête d'être pressé, parce qu'on arrive moins vite. . . . Moi, je ne demande pas mieux que de faire plaisir. Les uns veulent, les autres ne veulent pas. Arrangez un peu ça, pour voir . . . En v'là une qui ne voulait pas, puis elle a voulu. Alors, on l'a fait attendre . . . Enfin, ça y est, et, vrai ! elle l'a gagné ! Allons-y gaiement !

Et, lorsqu'il empoigna Gervaise dans ses grosses mains noires, il fut pris d'une tendresse, il souleva doucement cette femme qui

avait eu un si long béguin pour lui. Puis, en l'allongeant au fond de la bière avec un soin paternel, il bégaya, entre deux hoquets :

— Tu sais . . . écoute bien . . . c'est moi, Bibi-la-Gaieté, dit le consolateur des dames . . . Va, t'es heureuse.

Fais dodo, ma belle !

“ Fais dodo, ma belle ! ” This moves me as much as Othello's  
“ O ill-starred wench ! Pale as thy smock.”

*April 12*     Something must be done about this overwork. Here is  
*Friday.*     the tale of yesterday's mishaps :

1. Turned up an hour and a half late for a luncheon date with Roger Eckersley, who, more than excusably, had thought I wasn't coming. Traipsed from Boodle's to the Ivy, where

2. I had forgotten a party at which I was the host.

8. Overlooked an appointment with a very special dentist kindly arranged for me by Blanche Robey.

4. Failed to make use of a ten-guinea seat for 'a charity matinée under Royal patronage.

5. Forgot I was to attend the Royal Academy banquet. Spent the greater part of to-day concocting and dispatching apologetic lies. Nevertheless I wrote a damned good article yesterday. So what the hell !

Letter from a well-wisher :

May I draw your attention to Page 187 in *A Shorter Ego*, Vol. I, where you liken the defendants before the New York night court to “ the inmates of one of Gogol's doss-houses.” Gogol, *mon pied* ! You mean Gorky, and you know it !

What can I do except beat my breast ? Woke up at six o'clock this morning, having dreamed that I had made Beaumarchais say, “ Ce qui est trop bête pour être chanté, on le dit.” Calm restored when the post brings the proof, showing I had worried for nothing.

*April 13*     The theatre managers are at it again, and once more  
*Saturday.*     there is talk of barring me from first-nights. In a way  
I sympathise. Many of them have not been taught to see beyond the box-office. They fuss because I have no patience with rubbish. When you tell them that just as there are swing and jive concerts at which nobody would expect Newman to look in, and trashy novels that nobody would expect Desmond to look at, so there are theatrical entertainments that I just can't sit through—

when you tell them this they goggle. They have spent weeks, months, in dressing, lighting, and providing a setting for something they don't recognise as inanity. Why should they ? To this type of mind nothing on which money has been expended is inane. Anyhow, the storm is on ; I may weather it, or I may not. The *Observer* once patted me on the back for having " with the minuteness of a Himalayan surveying-party charted the highlands of Ibsen." Wonderful if I am hurled to destruction because I couldn't sit through *Song of Norway* !

*Winged Words :*

No. 9: We believe in this play, and we're going to fight. We shall fight, just as Mr Churchill told us, on the beaches and in the streets. Boys and girls, we are at this moment like the men at Dunkirk.

*Popular actress after musical-comedy flop*

No. 10: If the troubled soul of the tragic Wilde has any contact with this world it must have been soothed by the spontaneous and delighted laughter of their Majesties and the Princesses.

*Dramatic critic. Evening paper*

No. 11: This incarnation of concreteness, this apotheosis of the " too, too solid flesh," greatly perturbs the Puritan of logic. Over art's nude torso of erotic radium he hastily flings the covering garment of some safe preconception to spare his modesty.

*Review of Jacques Maritain's " Art and Poetry "*

*April 14 Sunday.* Spent the morning writing an Introductory Note to A. E. Wilson's *Playwrights in Aspic*. I have always been passionately, absurdly fond of parody and pastiche. Some of Max's *A Christmas Garland* first came out in the *Saturday Review* in 1906, and my oldest newspaper-cutting book shows that I pasted in the ' contributions ' week by week. I was going to treasure them, whether they came out in book form or not. (This did not happen till 1912. Chatto and Windus.) I know only one other volume, or rather three other volumes, comparable to Max's in wit and actuality. These are Paul Reboux and Charles Muller's *A la Manière de. . .* Of the sixty pieces the best seems to me to be the one on Edmond de Goncourt. Mine Loisel is to attend a ball, and we read :

Ainsi élégantisée, Mme Loisel eût tenté l'art des Latour, des Slingelandt, des Lawrence et des Rosalba Carriera ; elle possédait à la fois ce magnétisme souriant qu'exercent les adorables portraits du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, et cette captivance flexible qu'on voit aux

Geishas d'Hokousai et d'Outamaro. La princesse de M . . . disait un jour : " Nulle part la cohésion de molécules dont est fait l'être humain ne s'agrége plus harmonieusement qu'au bal."

Then comes the ball :

. . . avec ses enlacements berceurs au rythme d'un orchestre caché derrière un bosquet de gobéas, de palmiers et d'araucarias speluncas ; avec ses flirtages furtifs, ses étreintes en gants blancs ; ses passages d'une trémulation épileptoïde à un voluptueux étalement sur une causeuse capitonnée, à un badinage éventé d'une odeur d'œillet ou d'opoponax qui se mêle à l'arôme musqué de la femme ; le bal avec ses amusantes notes de clarté rose que les reflets des bougies piquent sur les épaules nues ; le bal où les teintes prismatiques des toilettes semblent décomposer la lumière en vibrances protéiformes, puis la recomposer soudain, dès que la giration des valse confond à nouveau les bleus, les jaunes, les oranges, les violets et les verts, et cela tour à tour, avec l'irisé capricieux d'un arc-en-ciel en vif argent.

This seems to me to catch, miraculously, the combination of scrupulous artist doubled with the self-conscious innovator.

*April 15* From an old lady giving her address as " Jasmine Monday. Cottage " :

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

It is good the way you deal with highbrow prose and poetry in *Ego 7*, and no doubt in other *Egos* too, which I have not read yet, altho' I intend to. It seems to me that the appropriate word for this sort of ' poetry ' is *masturbitic*.

Gratefully yours,

AN OLD LADY OF NINETY-THREE

*April 16* E. J. Robertson, of the *Daily Express*, gave a small *Tuesday*. luncheon party in a private room at the Dorchester to-day for the purpose of bringing Arthur Rank and me together. Also present Major Harold (Benny) Baker, General Manager of the Odeon circuit. No frills on Rank, who was obviously well disposed, and struck me as possessed of unusual understanding. But then I don't believe that a man can be shoved into the control of sixty-three millions of capital without having genius of some kind. I believe that he propels himself, and that it is the job of whoever comes into contact with a self-propeller to find out what his genius is. But since luncheon parties are unreliable affairs, in the sense that the interruption of a waiter may distort what one says, I decided to *read* what I had to say on the subject of British films. (I am not such a fool as to suppose that R., who is a busy man, came to the luncheon

for the sake of my *beaux yeux*.) Something R. said the last time we met suggested that he thought our film critics are prejudiced against British pictures. And I thought it was up to me to-day to disabuse his mind of this. Here is what I read :

In the matter of the film critics' alleged prejudice against British films. Here are some extracts from the notices of *Caravan* :

Caroline Lejeune (the *Observer*) :

The British *Caravan*, remotely drawn from Lady Eleanor Smith's novel, is so brazenly bad that it is almost exhilarating.

Dilys Powell (the *Sunday Times*) :

Finally a British film, *Caravan*, with Stewart Granger, Jean Kent, costume, gipsy weddings, and some moth-eaten dialogue which forces me to remark that, wherever my caravan may rest, it won't be here.

Richard Winnington (*News Chronicle*) :

*Caravan* is a blend of colourless glamour, sexless sex, passionless sadism, confident vulgarity, and Corner House period that Gainsborough have perfected.

Helen Fletcher (*Sunday Graphic*) :

*Caravan* doesn't say good-bye to any conventions. It's the sort of film that was old before it was born. There's nothing new in it, and nothing fresh. The best you can say is that at least it lacks the smut of *The Wicked Lady*. To enjoy it you need to have a mind that throbs to every sob of the novelette and a heart that throbs at every exposure of Stewart Granger's torso.

Campbell Dixon (the *Daily Telegraph*) :

If there is any ingredient left out of *Caravan*—sense, or life, for instance—you might let the producers know ; but, candidly, I think they are blameless. There just wasn't room.

*The Times* :

This particular caravan does not rest until it has completed the round of cinematic *clichés*. Lady Eleanor Smith at least wrote a novel, but here everything is reduced to the terms of the novelette.

The above are six responsible critics of the highest integrity, and it is manifest nonsense to suppose that the foregoing are not their genuine opinions. The writers in *The Times* and the *Sunday Graphic* use the word 'novelette,' which is the key-word to the whole situation. There is obviously a film audience for the film-novelette as there is for the novelette in fiction. Shop-boys and shop-girls are entitled to the kind of entertainment that appeals

to them. The point is that the British film-novelette cannot compete with the Hollywood film-novelette for reasons with which I have already acquainted Mr Rank. But even supposing that he can sell *Caravan* against dollars it is impossible that this picture should bring kudos to, or add to the prestige of, British pictures. I do not say that pictures like *Caravan* should not be made. What I do say is that while they will undoubtedly make money in this country, and may make money abroad, they will not help to raise the status of British pictures in the esteem of intelligent people. I want to be quite clear about this. I should no more attack Gaumont-British for making *Caravan* than I should attack the dressmaker who runs up cheap frocks for housemaids. The pictures which I shall go all out to support are pictures of the quality of *Millions Like Us*, *The Way Ahead*, and *The Captive Heart*. But these are large-scale films, and the material for a large-scale film, British in outlook and implications, does not come along every day. Now the French have a genius for making beautiful small films, costing very little money, the fame of which travels all over the world. I allude to films like *Le Rosier de Madame Husson* and *La Fin du Jour*. It is absurd to say that we cannot make pictures of this quality in England, for the reason that we have not yet tried. And when we do try, as in *Brief Encounter*, the director is so nervous that he hides it behind the skirts of a full-length performance of Rachmaninoff's second Piano Concerto. In my view one single film of the quality of any of the French films I have mentioned would do more for the credit of British pictures than fifty *Caravans* and *Wicked Ladies*.

Rank listened with extreme attention and asked for a copy.

April 17            Again to George Lyttelton :  
Wednesday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

I want your advice. For some time I have been wandering about the flat murmuring "worse if I continue." This is an echo of an old jingle I saw in *Punch* many years ago :

It's very hard to versify  
If rhyming isn't in you ;  
I think it will get worse if I  
Continue.

You've got the point, of course. Do I wind up *Ego* with No. 9 ? Have done about a quarter of this, and the plan is to run it to the end of the year, in time for publication on my seventieth birthday, in September 1919.

Here are some of the arguments for stopping. Or rather here is the only one that has weight with me. The book would be a com-

plete, rounded-off whole, and I should like to leave a work of art. You may look on the whole thing with a semi-favourable eye like Brother Mycroft, who wants me to give it up in favour of another theatrical biography like my *Rachel*. (But I don't want to write about anybody else.) Or you may think with Alan Dent that the Diary should never have been published in my lifetime. (I can just see the publishers rushing to secure a million words by a defunct dramatic critic!) The point is that, in so far as *Ego* is a work of art at all, to finish with No. 9 would make it a complete thing. And then there's the allied question: Is my mind good enough to run to further length? Is the bulk getting too big for the intellectual content?

I know that Pepys gave up because of his eyesight, and Macready when he left the stage. But I am not blind yet, and don't feel at all like Johnson's veteran. Actually I shan't be able to stop setting down whatever seems to be worthy of remark. (Edgar Lustgarten said yesterday that if one took Arnold Bennett out of the *Journals* there would be nothing left, whereas if you eliminated J. A. from *Ego* there would be a lot.) The idea, in that case, would be a Postscript published by my literary executors (ugh!) if they thought fit.

The alternative is to finish 9 and then bravely tackle 10, 11, and 12; so spacing them that 12 would end on June 1, 1952. This would complete the twenty years, *Ego's* first entry being dated June 2, 1919. I realise that there would be about this something of Stevenson's "Who would find heart enough to begin to live, if he dallied with the consideration of death?" Let's take it that after seventy "continued existence is a miracle." That is no reason why one should hang about doing nothing except wait for the miracle to cease. Last, I take as my cue Whitman's "After the Supper and Talk," with the ending:

. . . loth, O so loth to depart.  
Garrulous to the very last.

From *Sands at Seventy*, published in 1888. After which he gaily embarked on *Good-bye, My Fancy*, published in 1891. He died in '92. The *Works*, by the way, run to twelve volumes. Accepting that I have enough power of self-criticism to know when I am going gaga, and supposing that I don't, I want you to advise me, and entirely on the artistic score. Except for the delight of reading your fist I would enclose a postcard with two words written on it:

STOP  
GO

and ask you to run your pen through one of them.

Ever,  
J. A.

P.S. Perhaps "work of art" is putting the thing too high. Let's change "art" to "contrivance." I originally planned to

end *Ego* 8 with VJ Day. And did. Then Leo died, and I realised that readers who had heard of this but who couldn't know anything about the time lag between delivery of manuscript to publisher and publication of book would wonder at my apparent heartlessness. Which meant that I decided to carry the book on to the end of the year, utilising some 80,000 words of *Ego* 9. Which, again, meant deleting some 80,000 words to keep within the prescribed length. I did the deciding and deleting in thirty-five minutes one morning round about two o'clock.

One more little thing. I talked last night for an hour or so with four young men from Sherborne, up in Town on a seven-a-side Rugby tournament. Average age sixteen and a half. I felt that the age we are moving into is theirs, not mine. Horace Walpole had the sense to disappear with the eighteenth century. Ought I not to do the same? H. W. went out when poke bonnets came in. Ought I not to kiss my hand to a generation obviously about to plant its foot in my behind?

April 18            The Gentle Art continued :  
Thursday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

*To the Art Critic of the " Evening Standard " :*

SIR,

You write of Cézanne's water-colours that they are " rather like the game of chess, in which a masterly player, after two or three moves, has foreseen the conclusion and does not need to move any more pieces."

I see.

WHITE ( <i>Dr Lasker</i> )	BLACK ( <i>Capablanca</i> )
1. P to K 4	1. P to K 4
2. K Kt to K B 3	2. Q Kt to Q B 3
3. K B to Q B 4	3. K B to Q B 4

Then Lasker: " I say, Capablanca old boy, it's no use making any more moves. I foresee the conclusion." Sir, I have been showing harness horses for close on forty years and have the honour to be President of the Hackney Society. But you will not find in all the millions of words I have written a single illustration from the hunting-field. This because I don't know the first thing about hunting, and know that I don't know.

Your obedient servant,  
JAMES AGATE

*William Gaunt, Esq.*



Further Essay. Letter to a reviewer of *A Shorter Ego* :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

SIR,

You write that Shakespeare trumpeted and roared. To which category would you assign " Full fathom five " and " When that I was and a little tiny boy " ? You invite me to forget about horses and actors and read Auden and Spender and Comfort and Dymment and Treece. I am to try to comprehend the " new assonances, word-music, and thought-patterns." But I have read and I do comprehend, and I just don't like. If a poet has no word-music his thought must interest me ; if it doesn't, I care nothing for the thought-pattern. You tell me to note how, even when to-day's poets have failed, they have " opened new roads of technical development." As well ask me to approve the bouquet and body of a claret because somebody has found a way of making it out of old gum-boots !

Yours faithfully,  
JAMES AGATE

*Peter Baker, Esq.*  
c/o " *Poetry Quarterly* "

*Easter Sunday.* Horrified to find this morning that in last night's notice of the new Palladium show I made Virgil pile Pelion upon Ossa. It should, of course, have been the other way about. What was clever of me was to write the stuff in such a way that if it had to be cut it would still make sense. Actually, on receipt of the office message I cut the stuff myself, from ten inches to five, and in something under two minutes, as the taxi which was to take the copy to the S.T. office wouldn't wait. *I just put my pencil through every other sentence.* This meant sacrificing an elephant, a Ranee, a rainbow and a likening of Nat Jackley's marine to Kipling's " limping procrastitute " and " giddy harumfrodite." However, I managed to keep in a carthorse, a comparison between Tessie O'Shea and a battleship, a passage showing a surprising knowledge of the Yukon in 1890, and two quotations from Stevenson. A nice bit of work showing the super-professional touch. Meaning that the casual reader won't suspect the alteration of a word.

This afternoon, for the first time in my life, I was the first member of the audience to arrive at a theatre. The little Academy film theatre. The picture was *Fric-Frac*, the French comedy about crib-cracking. Directed by Maurice Lehmann, with Fernandel, Arletty, and Michel

Simon. The picture was at 8.55, the programme starting at 8.30. Realising the house would be packed, I arrived at 2.45 (!) and wheedled my way in. Spent the waiting time making comparative lists of the things France has meant to Raymond Mortimer, Charles Morgan, and J. A. Enfin "*Fric-Frac*" vint. One and three-quarter hours of superb realism, delicate irony, and exquisite wit. Three wonderful performances, and a fourth, unstarred, by a girl called Hélène Robert which would just make nonsense of anything our vaunted British film-stars could do. And then, from Fernandel as the innocent, I learned something that has always been a mystery to me—what Blackpool sees in George Formby. Fernandel begins by saying to the gangster's girl with whom he has fallen in love, "J'eusse préféré que vous vinssiez seule." And ends by understanding that in thieves' slang *scarper* means 'to clear out.' For Blackpool this would need translating. I can imagine Formby saying in the first instance, "I was 'oping, miss, you'd do me the favour of turning up alone." And ending by saying, "Git up them stairs!"

*Easter Monday.* Fulfilled engagement to help judge the London Van Horse Parade. Reassembled what is left of my old horse-showing finery, determined that, whether or not the judges recognised which were the right horses, the horses should have no difficulty in picking out at least one of the judges. The day was exquisite, Regent's Park was looking lovely, the cherry-blossom was better than Housman's poem about it, and the judging was superb! Took Gwen Chenhalls to lunch at the Savoy, and all very gay.

More of the Gentle Art :

Letter to Stephen Watts, the dramatic critic of the *Sunday Express* :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR STEPHEN WATTS,

What on earth has made you suggest to your readers that the cheats and crib-crackers in *Fric-Frac* belong to the *demi-monde*? "Il faut arriver de l'Afrique pour avoir cette idée-là!" as Dumas's Olivier de Jalin said. Michel Simon, Arletty, and the man in gaol do not belong to the half- or even quarter-world; they are "les bas-fonds de la société." Here is Dumas's own note on the *demi-monde*—the word, as you of course remember, which he introduced to the French language: "*Demi-monde. Établissons donc ici,*

pour les dictionnaires à venir, que le demi-monde ne représente pas, comme on le croit, comme on l'imprime, la cohue des courtisanes, mais la classe des déclassées." Paula Tanqueray and her kind. Nothing to do with burglars, who are not on the fringe of anything.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

April 28      An exchange of letters :  
Tuesday.

10 *Shepherd House* .  
*Shepherd Street, W.1*

DEAR MR AGATE,

The pity of it ! Leo Pavia is one of your best character studies. I felt I *knew* him from *Ego*, although some of his sallies seem to have just missed it, while your brother Edward could score nothing but bull's-eyes. I always imagined L. P. as a product of specifically German-Jewish\* culture (not *Kultur* !). In fact, he must have been *un Européen par excellence*. Please reassure me that he worshipped Pallenberg. He must have.

Why not publish the Collected Letters of Edward Agate ? Living and dying with his *panache* of artistic integrity unstained must make a man worthy of being remembered.

Why listen to envious critics and deprive your readers' grandchildren of the knowledge of what the food cost that went to the making of James Agate's frame ?

And all this from a man who faithfully promised to refrain from pestering you with further letters. I should hate to become a nuisance to you, and therefore hereby solemnly dissolve you from any obligation, moral or otherwise, you might feel to answer any letter of mine. If I begin to bore you, throw me away unread.

I saw you sitting in your box at the Winter Garden (like the Cardinal at the Hôtel de Bourgogne) the night Mr Valk bawled Desdemona out of her misery. I can't help feeling that his General was too Teutonic for a Moor. More Rommel than Othello. But the passion of his jealousy was Othello all right, and so were all the other emotions. Othello was all over the stage that night. Shakespeare was nowhere.

The quotation about "a man of genius who is not a man of honour" on Page 162 of *A Shorter Ego II* comes from *The Doctor's Dilemma*. You might be interested to know.

"*Was duftet doch der Flieder*" ? What, no lilac ? Some shades may haunt you for this. "*Wie duftet doch der Flieder*" ?

I was enchanted by your review of the new Priestley. I too like my Priestley this side of Jordan.

Yours sincerely,  
GUY DEGHY

I counter :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR MR DEGHY,

Many thanks for your letter. Too busy to do more than sketch a reply.

Who is or was Pallenberg ? Even my twenty-year-old secretary, who knows everything, hasn't heard of him. I have just heard, meaning that when I see the name in the *New Statesman* I turn the page at once.

There is no more of my brother Edward that I think he would want to be published.

I don't take any notice of critics except to put them in their place. I should love you to become a witty nuisance.

*Re Valk.* I agree, except that he was more like Von Stroheim as Rommel. Of course the perfect Othello must have poetry as well as passion. But, if I must choose, I prefer some unmellifluous brute—and Valk is very far from that—to some unwarlike pansy.

Of course I know where the line about the man of genius who is not a man of honour comes from. But there's an art in concealing knowledge as well as displaying it. Makes the reader pat himself on the back. I knew whom I was improving when, in my Dreyfus play, I gave Esterhazy his exit line : " Monsieur Zola, do you know anything more pitiful than a man of dishonour who has not made a success of it ? "

" *Was duftet.* " But for years, as soon as the lilac has been out, I have been wandering round my flat humming and saying to myself " *Wie duftet . . .* " Now I am cursed with the mania for accuracy, which makes me verify everything—even the things I'm sure about. If you will do me the honour to call on me I will show you the H.M.V. record, Catalogue Number D 1351, where " *Was* " stares me in the face printed in gold letters. Fool, fool ! I ought to have (a) relied on myself or (b) consulted a German record. My trusted Leo Pavia *m'aurait sauvé*, as Balzac in his last illness said of his own creation, *le docteur Bianchon*.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

*Winged Words.* No. 12 : I have done a lot of work already at the Passacaglia. This does not seem to me like the creation of man at all, it is inspired, and that is not forgetting that I have an intimate acquaintance with all the great master works from Bach, Brahms, Beethoven, Liszt, Busoni, Medtner, and all the others—no greater monument to the memory of Schubert is possible. Of all the countless pages composed since the dawn of music, your Passacaglia and 44 Variations is the apotheosis.

*Letter to the Pianist. Paul Howard*  
" *Midnight Thoughts on Leopold Godowsky* "

April 24      Reply from George Lyttelton :  
Wednesday.

Finndale House  
Grundisburgh  
Suffolk

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

After giving, for nearly forty years, advice that was rarely sought and still more rarely taken, it is a new and valued honour to have it asked for ! I have pondered long over your letter, and will answer with the frankness that J. A. expects from his friends and always gives them.

I think you should certainly go on with *Ego* after No. 9. The only valid reasons, to my mind, for stopping would be that (a) you or (b) others are bored with it. Is there any sign of either ? You say that when talking to those young Sherborne lads you felt the coming age was theirs and not yours. Well, all men over fifty (earlier ?) almost always feel something of that, especially when such times as we live in have so gashed and mangled so many traditions that the young may well feel that they really have no roots in the past—that what anybody said or thought before 1914 or even 1919 has no importance for the present. All I can tell you is that, to my certain knowledge, you have many faithful readers among the young—of both sexes.

And how is your seventieth birthday an end or climax for anyone but you ? If you were seventy-conscious (like Whitman), and imparted that consciousness to your readers, it would be different, but you aren't and don't. Mentally you have nothing of the rising septuagenarian about you. If you want a time-climax, I think *Ego's* twentieth year, or even No. 12, would be a much better one. But a diary surely needn't be *teres atque rotundus* like a poem. Pepys's stopping through his fear of blindness was wholly to be deplored. The right time for *Ego's* end will be when you feel (shall you ever ?) a waning of that interest in men and things and of that felicity in wording it, which, if you don't mind my saying so, makes the *Egos* such enormous fun to read and re-read. That will be the moment for drawing to an artistic close, with "calm of mind, all passion spent." Or, to use your own less Miltonic but equally expressive phrase, if you don't go gaga. I am sure you should go on. After all, still later than *Sands at Seventy* Whitman wrote, "On, on the same, ye jocund twain ! My life and recitative . . ."

As to your parallel between Horace Walpole going out when poke-bonnets came in and you yielding to the *argumentum a tergo* of the rising generation—well, H. W.'s letters are still read by those who do read (it may be, of course, that in 2000 no one will), and the wearers of the poke-bonnets are stopping some bung-hole. And so will *Ego* be read when those Sherbornians' great-grandchildren are

toothless nonentities, and good men will be lamenting after finishing Vol. 12, "What, is there no more?"

Well, them's my sentiments. You may think them irrelevant, stupid, and negligible, but you must not think them anything but absolutely sincere.

Yours ever,  
GEORGE LYTTTELTON

I couldn't let this go unanswered.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

You have lifted a great load from my mind, for I believe that I should have taken the contrary advice if you had given it. Some of my best friends think very little of *Ego*, and argue that I ought to wind up the career I make so much fuss about with a piece of major dramatic criticism. But I know that I haven't got a piece of major criticism in me—for example, I don't care two hoots about the new poetic drama—and have spent the war years trying to conceal from *Sunday Times* readers how thin the soil is. One of my friends suggests a vast theatrical biography. Another wants me to review the trend of dramatic criticism in this country since there was any, complete, I understand, with critical essays on Hazlitt, Lewes, Shaw, Archer, Walkley, Montague, Max. They don't seem to realise that even if I could do this I am too tired. And then again, *I don't want!* The truth is that I have exhausted the Theatre. On the other hand I have not yet exhausted Life, though that old hussy has taken a lot out of me these last few months.

In the meantime here are bits out of four letters, all received since I wrote you.

From a Lieutenant-Colonel, writing from the Royal Bombay Yacht Club :

"Again many thanks, and may you long live, to annoy me with your discourse on life in general and J. A. in particular."

From a lady in Western Australia :

"Just a word of thanks to you for Septego—a word from an admirer 'way across the world in a sleepy little suburb in Western Australia—the deadest track of country in the world. I've been here for five years—thanks to those two odious little men Hitler and Togo, and nothing has happened to me except your *Egos*. So please don't die—for at least another year—for I'm sure I'll be here for Huitego."

From a journalist exiled in Buenos Aires :

"I have discovered the ideal way of passing the immense number of hours required to digest all the food one eats here : I

subscribed for six books at a time at Harrod's library ; and took out all the *Egos*. And I have read them all again, with as much happiness as I first read them, which is saying a lot. Although I've only been away from home for a month, and shall be back in three weeks, they made me feel homesick for London, and to hell with the food and drink here."

From a Squadron-Leader in Canada :

" I am amazed at myself. I, the merest layman, have uttered a small, polite growl at the direct, lineal descendant of Hazlitt. I am horrified. I can only atone by my idolatry. At home once more in Canada, six *Egos* and four books of criticism (no more were procurable) stand on my shelves, slightly uncomfortable, perhaps, in the shadow of the Rockies, but much thumbed, much talked-over with friends, who may read them, but *only on the premises*, and who, poor souls, had never heard before of James Agate. Each morning brings the thought "to-day may be the DAY," for Harrap's are sending me the very last copy of *Ego 7* they possess. . . . Will that make amends, especially as it is all true ? "

I have bothered you with these extracts to prove to myself that your advice is right and that I am right in taking it. Who am I to say No to India, Australia, South America, and Canada ? Wherefore I hoist myself shakily into the saddle and ride somewhat gaspingly on, trying to feel like something by Burne-Jones and looking, doubtless, like the White Knight in *Alice*.

Anyhow, thank you and bless you !

Ever,  
J. A.

P.S. The rain of correction never ceases. Brother Mycroft writes me to-day :

" *A Shorter Ego*, Vol. I, Page 159. 'Hari-kari' should be 'Hara-kiri.' (Jap., *hara*, 'belly' ; *kiri*, 'cut.' *Chambers's Dictionary*.) "

Sackcloth, please, or rather " Hairi-shirti " !

*April 25 Thursday.* The young man from Canada has arrived and been presented to Rank, who received him with open arms. Everybody suitably impressed, and within half an hour we got a fashionable bootmaker to add an inch to his height. After the ordeal, which he came through very well, I took him for a drink to a little club where the wireless was discoursing *Tristan and Isolde*. This settled the question of the name, since everybody is agreed that " George Calderwood " is too long. I laid it down, and the boy agreed, that he shall be known as Tris Calder.

Last night at a Bloomsbury party into which I had been inveigled

a Beard brought up a young man and said, "Mr Agate, here is somebody who would like you to talk to him." I waved them away, but the Beard insisted. Again I waved, but the Beard wasn't to be denied :

J. A. The old gentleman will be witty by and by.

THE BEARD. Sir, the young man can wait.

*April 26* Waking early and unable to get to sleep again, I composed  
*Friday.* the following poem :

#### SALUTE TO VITAMINS

Vitamins A, B, C, and X, Y, Z,  
Are indicated to correct those low  
Ascorbic-acid levels leading to  
Derangement of protein metabolism.  
Oh, for a box to well and duly numb  
Hypersensation due to this or that,  
Also my woefully impaired response,  
Erythropoietic it seems to me,  
Which may or may not be anæmia ' . .

I had got so far when the post arrived. The first letter was from Cambridge. "I am drawing a bow at a venture because I don't know whether you are still alive." Perhaps I am not. Perhaps I am losing vitality. Perhaps my ascorbic-acid levels are too low. Rang up my disgusting doctor, who ordered me away for a week, advice which I think I shall take, Brother Harry urging me to go to Bridlington to cheer his spouseless and unoffspring'd thoughts. Before I go I feel that one more Essay in the Gentle Art is called for. Hence this letter to Bertie van Thal :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR BERTIE, SWEET BERTIE, LOVELY BERTIE,

You know I dote on you. Why, then, do you behave like a mindless oyster? Have you not over and over again shown me your blurbs for other people? Why take it on yourself to pass the blurb to *Around Cinemas* without consulting me? What in Bloomsbury—my new expletive—do you mean by calling my shy little essays

#### PERTINACIOUS ?

This word means obstinate, perversely persistent as beggars are. And my essays are not beggars. Dear Bertie, lovely Bertie, sweet Bertie, withdraw the blurb or I'll withdraw the book and publish with the insignificant Macmuddle or the paltry Poop instead of the omnipotent Home and van Thal. Then there's the jacket-



photo of Gish. Don't you realise that this suggests that the book is illustrated, with resulting disappointment to the reader? Whereas between covers she comes as a surprise. Remove her, please. "I beseech you, be ruled by your well-willer." If you aren't, by Fitzroy Square I'll revoke the dedication to my next book . . . and how will you like that?

J.

*April 28 Sunday.* The train to York was one hour and twenty minutes late. No stop except Doncaster, and signals in our favour all the way. Reason for being late? Just that the engine couldn't go fast enough. Arthur Bates and I missed the last two seats, and had to sit on our suitcases all the way. But we had the corridor all to ourselves and were really very comfortable. Found Harry physically fit but mentally tired. I agree that when a surveyor does a sum in acres, roods, and perches and gets the answer in pounds, shillings, and pence it is obvious that he has been overworking.

Spent the evening going through the family archives—*i.e.*, a dozen or so of huge newspaper-cutting books. Found all sorts of things, including a photograph of Harry at the age of four. He kept his curls—bright gold and nearly waist-length—till he was six, and I remember how my mother cried when my father insisted that they should be cut off. Also a photo of Brother Mycroft as Titania in a school performance of the *Dream*—unnecessary to say who was the Bottom on that occasion! We borrowed Harry, whose curls—they were really ringlets—made him the ideal Peaseblossom. This is perhaps the place to recall—if I have not already done so—the rôles in which I distinguished myself as a boy actor. Bottom, Shylock, Cardinal Wolsey, Harpagon in Molière's *L'Avare*, and Don Diègue in Corneille's *Le Cid*. All that I had of the good performer was a good memory.

*April 29 Monday.* A three hours' tour of the beauties of York is not my notion of a rest-cure. But Harry was not to be denied, and the Castle Museum, known as the Kirk collection, is certainly a breath-taking affair. The first exhibit you see is a series of period rooms—a Victorian parlour more authentically documented than any stage-set Irene Hentschel has ever dreamed of, a Georgian room, a Yorkshire farm-kitchen, and so on. Suddenly you look out on to a street with bow-window'd shop-fronts, cobblestones, a barouche, and an early hansom. People are walking about, and at first you don't realise that they are visitors to the Museum;

it was only the stillness of the two horses that made me realise that the whole thing was under glass. Wonderful detail, down to the differentiation between the proud Hackney in the gentleman's carriage and the humble nag in the coach plying for hire. A remarkable collection, principally the work of one man, a country doctor, presented to the city just before the War and now housed in the old Castle.

The notion that you cannot have high wind and fog at one and the same time is false. At Scarborough, after a journey through country which Harry says is best described as 'open,' we ran into a 'sea-fret' coupled with a marrow-freezing wind. (The two perfectly explain Sibelius!) Found a delightful boarding-house, newer than any pin, a pub with unlimited whiskey, and a hire-service driver willing to wait. Otherwise this place—Bridlington—is as though somebody had uprooted Hackney Wick and planked it down on Canvey Island. Went to the pictures and slept through *Meet Me on Broadway*. Harry says that the proper thing to do on a rest-cure is to rest. Bed before twelve.

*April 30* Cold and cheerless. Nothing to do, and nothing to see *Tuesday*. except ex-repertory actresses trundling about on bicycles. Diarised and got chilled to the bone sitting on Flamborough Head. To the pictures (twice), after which Harry entertained us with card tricks—which he has not done for twenty years—and it was all very, very Tchekhovian.

*May 1* Letter from my monitor :  
*Wednesday*.

10 *Shepherd House*  
*Shepherd Street, W.1*

DEAR MR AGATE,

"Samedi, aujourd'hui, deux heures après dîner, Monsieur de Bergerac est mort assassiné." Having had dinner at eight, I settled down to read the paper at ten, and was informed that *Cyrano* is to be produced in English. Which butcher will be commissioned to tear the noble alexandrine into the shreds of blank verse? Also that Mr Olivier is to play Lear. He likes playing old men, and did very well indeed as Shallow. But Shallow is a man of human proportions and Lear isn't. He is well over life-size, and I doubt whether Olivier can fill that figure. Then those two hardy old bores *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Doctor Faustus* are to be with us again. To cap it all, another Priestley, the title of which clearly indicates that it will be what Goethe called "ein garstig' Lied, ach ein politisch Lied!" And I had hoped that Mr Pascal's 'generosity'

had provided the costumiers with enough togas, helmets, laurel wreaths, and Roman armour to enable the Old Vic to put on *Julius Cæsar*, *Coriolanus*, or *Antony and Cleopatra*; perhaps another Chekhov, another Ibsen, another Shaw and—as Mr Olivier has the paraphernalia for the Grecian nose—perhaps another Greek. But the programme for the next season is hardly suitable for what will undoubtedly be Britain's National Theatre. Such a pity, because the last season was superb. I have never seen Chekhov acted as it should be, even by Russians. The Old Vic *Uncle Vanya* was to my mind perfection.

Never again consult a gramophone record for reference. But if you take a morbid delight in hunting for howlers, glance through an H.M.V. catalogue. It is full of the funniest specimens. Incidentally, this week's prize howler goes to (obviously) a typist on the *Daily Telegraph*. A musical notice dealing with the abominable Bartók refers to the Hungarian cymbalist Ady. He was a symbolist poet.

Concerning modern lyrics, one could paraphrase Beaumarchais's dictum—namely, that which is too stupid to be sung should be swung. If this gibberish is only written to accentuate or syncopate the music, I suggest a more effective and modern course—namely, to let the band-leader beat the rhythm on the crooner's head with a functional chromium blunderbuss or periodically tug at a cat's tail to punctuate the syncopes. Even the late T. E. Dunville's lines about hobnail and boat-tax made some sort of sense, and they certainly put to shame anything like this modern notion of syncopulation.

Bol-li-ka, wol-li-ka !

GUY DEGHy

Motored to Scarborough, partly to renew acquaintance with Mrs Laughton, mother of Charles, and partly to show Harry the Queen's Hotel, where *Ego* was begun. Found my old friend in great fettle—Charles's name was blazoned all over the cinema across the road—and the Pavilion as charming and elegant as ever. Alas ! the Queen's Hotel, where I stayed with Monty Shearman in 1932, has been badly damaged. From which it is evident that certain bricks and mortar have not outlived my powerful prose.

*May 3* On Wednesday morning the page proofs of *Ego* 8 arrived.  
*Friday.* Put in fourteen hours of solid work on them—good rest-cure stuff !—and sent them off to my good friend Frank Dunn, to check and counter-check.

*May 4* Scoured the countryside to find a cricket match. Too  
*Saturday.* early. Did the Lighthouse on Flamborough Head.  
Or rather sat in the car and drank in the sunshine and listened to Jack Hill, its amiable driver and own brother to Joe

Gargery, tell his story of Yorkshire's Most Predatory Female. His small boys, aged three and two, had taken their seven weeks' puppy for a walk. On their return in tears and minus the puppy he gathered that they had met a little girl accompanied by her mother, that the little girl had stroked the puppy, and that her mother had said, "Pick it up and take it home."

In the evening to see Shirley Temple in *Kiss and Tell*. In London I should have thought this a horror; here it was my last defence against a touring company in *Lilac Time*. A revolting story of a chit of fifteen who, to screen a school-friend, pretends to be pregnant. (What the six-year-old little girl in front of me made of it I don't know.) One witty line uttered by the outraged father, unable to contact the doctor spending the afternoon on the links: "Obstetricians shouldn't play golf!"

We go back to-morrow, thank Heaven!

*May 6* Harold Hobson, who deputised for me on Sunday more *Monday*. than brilliantly, sends me this note:

*Our Town*, which I saw on Tuesday, is the most exhilarating play I have yet seen, whose third act is presented in a graveyard by a cast of corpses. Have you seen Yorkshire play Lancashire at Bramall Lane on Whit Monday? Well, *Our Town* is slower, much slower, than that. There is one pace of America making up to a pretty girl. There is another pace of America entering a war. *Our Town* is the pace of America entering a war.

And now I must settle down to serious work again. I have been grieved not to encounter in all the acres I have covered a single stroke of wit, and humiliated to find that I was not the cause of wit in other men. Shall tell *Tatler* readers that Wilde was 100 per cent. right when he said that country people, who have no means of becoming cultured or corrupt, stagnate. That I hold Yorkshire to be a mistake. That next year, as a good Lancastrian, I shall go to Morecambe, which salubrious resort combines, as the polite world knows, the wit of Paris with the elegance of pre-War Vienna, and adds to the virtues of Buda the vices of Pesth.

*May 7* Letter to George Lyttelton :  
*Tuesday*.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR G. L.,

Roast me in sulphur! Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid paraffin! Have just discovered that in an early essay, "Play-

going," I attribute "You are old, Father William" to Wordsworth! Also that in *Ego* 7 I make Dumas's Olivier de Jalin say, "Il faut arriver d'Afrique" instead of "de l'Afrique"! Let me keep my reason and change the subject.

Yesterday, at the London Sessions, my burglar was sent to prison for nine months. I had placed the time at three o'clock in the afternoon or shortly after, whereas Booth-Palmer swore to 3.45, and was confirmed by the local cop, who had entered 3.52 in his book. Whereupon Counsel for the defence asked the jury to regard me as a muddle-head whose testimony in other matters could not be relied on! Did I boil? I think I should have boiled over if I hadn't caught in the Judge's right eye something that might have been a wink. My idiot burglar—I thought he was distinctly feeble-minded—is an East End Jew tailor who has had and held three jobs in twenty years and has the highest references, including one from his last employer, who is willing to take him back. The police inspector very gentle and considerate. Spoke about a poor home and no money saved, but a contented wife and two well-cared-for children. These kids are going to worry me. Wuo's going to feed them till their father comes out? I wish now that Booth-Palmer hadn't caught the fellow red-handed. Or that we had had the sense to let him go. Is this feebly sentimental?

And last for something more cheerful. Coming back from Yorkshire I travelled with a man who told me a lot about himself and then asked what my trade was. I said, "Dramatic critic." He said, "Ay. A ticklish job. I had a brother as used to be dramatic critic to Carl Brisson."

No more for now.

Ever,  
J. A.

*May 8* A storm in a Wagnerian teacup blows, so to speak, a  
*Wednesday.* pretty gale. One such has been whistling round my head throughout the past fortnight. It began with a letter from a lady:

How dare you think of my Cobbler's "Flieder" as the lilac? Never again keep company with Hans Sachs in Kew in Lilac-time—but in Nuremberg on St John's Eve look with him for the serpent under the not-so-innocent elder-flower. It wasn't the torrents of spring, but midsummer madness, that went to everybody's head that night in Act Two. It wasn't Proserpine, but the Elder-Mother, who crazed the townsfolks' wits, and set them serenading, brawling, and eloping in the moonshine. Don't trust your memory, your dictionary, or even your botany. Trust your sense of superstition—and on St John's Eve mistrust the elder-flower as you would the serpent. *Der Flieder war's! Johannisnacht!*

Whereupon I hied me to the nearest considerable town and consulted the reference library's up-to-date dictionary. In the German-English section I found: "*FLIEDER*—elder; *spanischer Flieder*—lilac." In the English-German section: "*ELDER*—*der (schwarze) Holunder*." Lastly I looked up *Holunder*, and found that in German lilac is *spanischer Holunder*! Difficult enough when lexicographers differ, but when the same dictionary quarrels with itself . . . !

And all the time the storm over "*Wie duftet*" and "*Was duftet*" continued unabated. It was while inspecting the Lighthouse on Flamborough Head that I decided to apply to Ernest Newman for elucidation. He at once replied:

In virtually every edition I know, both of score and of poem-apart-from-the-score, it's *Wie*, which is undoubtedly the correct word. But, very strangely, there's *one* exception. In the original *orchestral* score it's *Was*!!! You can take this as certain: I have a copy of the original issue of 1868. A facsimile of the whole of the *orchestral manuscript* was published some years ago, but as I don't possess this I can't say whether it's *Wie* or *Was* there. If it's *Was*, I should say, offhand, that this is merely another of the many mistakes Wagner used to make in the hurry of getting his stuff on to paper: in *all* the editions of *Tristan*, for example, he makes Brangaene speak of "blue strips of land" in the *West*, when obviously he means in the *East*.

*Und das ist das!* Unless, of course, some dictionary would like me to spell the last word with two s's and a curly tail to the second one like the serpent under the elder! Query: Have we been misreading Shakespeare all this time? Did Lady Macbeth say "Look like the innocent Flieder, but be the serpent under't"?

May 9            In a letter from Belgium:  
Thursday.

Vous êtes, Monsieur, un homme selon mon cœur. Sauf que *A Shorter Ego* me laisse sur ma faim, je veux bien vous avouer que je n'ai plus eu de lecture plus délectable depuis le *Journal* de Jules Renard. Mais, entre nous, votre frère Édouard—à en juger par ce que vous rapportez et reproduisez de lui—était d'une autre trempe que vous! Quelle intégrité! Quel caractère! Quel esprit! Quelle plume, aussi! *Salva reverentia*, vous n'arriviez pas à sa cheville! Je vous avouerai que, parvenu à la page 115 du tome II, à la date du 22 octobre 1940, j'ai été profondément affecté par la nouvelle de sa mort—laquelle m'a laissé mélancolique pour le reste de ma lecture.

**May 10** My doctor, *de plus en plus dégoûtant*, insisted on my visiting his dentist in Hackney rather than continue on a diet of Codein, Anadin, and Veganin. It was the first time I had had a tooth extracted to the accompaniment of a cornet solo in the street immediately beneath the surgery window.

To-night's revue at the Ambassadors, *Sweetest and Lowest*, was immensely witty and cruel. If ridicule could kill, the Picasso-ites, four British film-stars, and one globe-trotting actor-author-propagandist would be handing in their checks.

**May 11** The Gentle Art again :  
**Saturday.** To Patrick Kirwan, film critic of the *Evening Standard* :

I could forgive you believing that Meyerbeer wrote *Faust* and Donizetti *Rosenkavalier*. What I will not excuse is your thinking that " I Want to Sing in Opera " was sung by George Formby père. Ever heard of Wilkie Bard ?

**May 12** In his introduction to the English edition of *More than Sunday*. Somewhat E. C. Bentley wrote :

In all the Runyon stories, as published in America, I have found only one single instance of a verb in the past tense. It occurs in one of those included in this book ; and you may try to find it, if—as Runyon's guy might say—you figure there is any percentage in doing so. And, as that same guy might go on to say, I will lay plenty of 6 to 5 that it is nothing but a misprint ; but I do not think it is the proper caper for me to improve on Runyon's prose, so I leave it.

In *Furthermore* I found another example of the past tense : "The Lemon Drop Kid *put* a lozenge into his mouth." Now, in *Runyon à la Carte*, I discover two more. In the story called *Old Em's Kentucky Home* I find : " Not far from the house are the remainders of some buildings that look as if they *burned* down a long time ago." In *Cleo* occurs : " She is a brown-haired pretty who *had* a dancing background." As this makes a total of three slips which I have detected—three more than any other student—what about Harvard presenting me with an honorary degree ?

**May 13** Spent last Saturday morning diarising and answering  
**Monday.** letters. No, I will not go down to Bristol and lecture for a fee of three guineas plus expenses. No, I will not talk to East Anglians for no fee and no expenses. No, I do not know why brass bands are always out of tune. No, I cannot tell a young

man how to become a "litiry" critic. Yes, I will write an advertisement for a commercial firm, and supply a photograph, if (a) the stuff they are selling is something I can reasonably be connected with, and (b) they give me £100 free of tax. No, I do not know the value of a complete set of the Waverley Novels, edition unknown. Yes, I will lunch with the representatives of the French film industry and talk for as long as they like in return for a glass of cognac. No, I am not on the staff of *Punch*, and what makes the blasted idiot think I am? Yes, I am prepared to say which are the best twelve books in the English language, and do so. Tell a literary society in Cheshire that the best way to find out why Ibsen was a great dramatist is to read his plays. Yes, I will write 1200 words at one-quarter my usual rates for a paper published in Moscow to help its readers to some knowledge of the English theatre. Yes, I will talk free of charge to some East End boys and girls. Thirty-one letters, plus two manuscripts returned, also a book on Beddoes lent me by a Bloomsbury intellectual and which unaccountably turns out to be the property of a public library in the Midlands. Item, a signed photograph to please a Miss Boakes who cannot endure life in the Mendips unless she has my picture to look at.

And then an extraordinary thing happened. Some time before the War Clement Scott's daughter gave me her father's newspaper-cutting book containing several thousand dramatic criticisms covering the period 1811-33. I turned this into a little book called *These Were Actors*. Then, during my stay at Oxford in 1919, an anonymous donor presented me with four small volumes of theatrical press-cuttings for the years 1919 . Bound in shiny black stuff and falling to pieces. To me enormously interesting, but not enough for a volume. On Saturday morning I received an enormous parcel, which turned out to contain one hundred and twenty large envelopes, each holding ten and sometimes twenty cuttings about some play or production. Period 1897-1906. In less than ten minutes I had decided to make another little book out of these and the black books. Unfortunately the original collector—a covering letter explained that they had been bequeathed to the sender, who had chosen me as an alternative to the salvage dump—had in nearly all cases cut off the name of the paper and the date. This obviously called for a lot of niggling work, and I had given Booth-Palmer the week-end off. And then the doorbell rang, and a young man carrying a lot of *Egos* presented himself. Would I sign them, please? Now I have a shark's eye for anybody to get me out of a jam. "Come in. Who



and what are you ? ” “ John Compton. Air Force.” “ Hobbies ? ”  
 “ James Agate and cricket. I’m pretty good at the first and not bad  
 at the second.” “ How bad at the second ? ” “ Before the War  
 I won one of Jack Hobbs’s bats. Took 8 wickets for 4 runs. Was  
 given a trial at the nets at Canterbury. Last week I did the hat  
 trick with the first three balls of the season. Also made top score.”  
 “ Going in for cricket when you get demobbed ? ” “ No. Not good  
 enough. I was better at sixteen. What I’m looking for is something  
 connected with the theatre.” “ Where are you stationed ? ” “ St  
 Athans. On leave till Monday night.” “ My secretary’s on leave.  
 Care to do a locum ? Three guineas plus hotel bill.” “ My hotel’s  
 fixed up and I don’t want money.” “ Well, what do you want ? ”  
 “ To be in *Ego*.”

And so the bargain was struck. We worked for the rest of Satur-  
 day, all Sunday, and all to-day till the boy had to leave. By that  
 time all the 1500 cuttings had been dated and arranged in their proper  
 order.

*May 14* Last night after the young man had gone I sat on work-  
*Tuesday.* ing. At 4 A.M. the book was finished. Sixty thousand  
 words plus forty illustrations, some from my private  
 collection and some as the result of rummaging in the shops on my  
 way back from lunch yesterday and to-day. There’s always time  
 to do a thing if you want to do it hard enough.

*May 18* The Hackney Show has come and gone. Two beautiful  
*Saturday.* animals. Frank Haydon’s Solitude, a thirteen-year-  
 old bay stallion by Buckley Courage out of Dark Vision  
 by St Adrian, and Nigel Colman’s Black Magic of Nork by Spotlight  
 out of Silhouette of Nork by Mathias A. I. I could have looked at  
 these all day. The Luncheon was, I think, a success. Certainly a  
 better meal than any I have eaten in London during the past six  
 years. Forty guests, who got through ten of the dozen bottles of  
 Burgundy and eight of the dozen of champagne Eddie Tatham kindly  
 let me have. One of the ignominies, or perhaps I mean humiliations,  
 attendant upon war is that hosts watch every time a glass is lifted  
 in the hope that a few drops of the unprocurable stuff may be left  
 over ! I did quite well to-day with six whole bottles for booty. Made  
 a goodish, because very short, speech on the theme of You Can’t  
 Give Old Heads New Shoulders, the idea being to welcome new  
 blood. Crewe is unchanged : I could write a book about its repositories

and horse sales. It was at Crewe that I met Alexander Gemmell, bought Vivianette, and sold Talke Princess and First Edition. The old desk is still in the hall of the delightful Crewe Arms Hotel, and the day and night porters have been there for forty-one and thirty-three years respectively. George Mathew went with me; Brother Mycroft, Albert Throup, and Frank Dunn turned up; and all very jolly, including that gay and gallant sportswoman Lady Daresbury, for whom I have invented the sobriquet, "Betsey Trotwood on Horseback."

*May 19 Sunday.* Whenever I have been out of Town for a day I always expect to find that the world has been remade in my absence. But it hasn't. Awaiting me last night was the first copy of *Around Cinemas*. I open this, and my eye at once falls on "It is impossible to take seriously the Andromagues [*sic*] and the Chimènes of Messrs Racine and Corneille." And what, pray, are "one's evening's [*sic*] studs and waistcoat buttons"?

Next I turn to the accounts of yesterday's heavyweight affair between the British Bruce Woodcock and the American Tami Mauriello. In this once again the Englishman rose from the canvas after the count of ten a sadder and a wiser man. Here is Woodcock talking to the New York representative of the *Sunday Express*—it seems that Tami had caught him with his head on the left side of his, Bruce's, skull above the left ear:

This is in no sense an attempt to make an excuse, first because I have always said that no squealer deserves any sympathy in a rough game like boxing, and secondly because I know this was just one of those accidents that happen in any rough-and-tumble. It could just as easily have happened to Mauriello as to me.

But why do these mishaps invariably happen to our side? Why, since this one could just as easily have happened to the American fellow, didn't it? *It never does*. I don't know whether Montgomery is a good general or not. I know that whenever in the last war we had a victory he was around and about. I am tired of those brilliant generals who are always mixed up with defeats. And I am equally tired of the British heavyweight who does nothing except come up pluckily for more. In the meantime Mr Mauriello gives me No. 18 in my *Winged Words* series:

I had a haircut and a shave and a manicure before the fight in honour of the Englishman. We gentlemen got to stick together.

*Tami Mauriello in an interview*

**May 20** What about an essay on "The Beauties of Hazlitt"?  
**Monday.** Though a master of quotation—the index gives three thousand five hundred and twelve—W. H. could come to the point better than any other English writer I know. It is this quality that I admire most in him, and it is upon Hazlitt and not Montague that I have modelled what I am pleased to call my style.

The Cockney ventures through Hyde Park Corner, as a cat crosses a gutter. The trees pass by the coach very oddly. The country has a strange blank appearance. It is not lined with houses all the way, like London. A cow in a field, a magpie in a hedge, are to him very odd animals—he can't tell what to make of them, or how they live.

This is superb, and to me better than Lamb, who fantasticates too much and could never have written "Mr Nollekins died the other day at the age of eighty, and left 240,000 pounds behind him, and the name of one of our best English sculptors." But then Charles wouldn't have wanted to write like this; he was all for the bypath and not the highroad. Talking of roads, I came across this to-day in the essay "On Old English Writers and Speakers":

The Rev. Job Orton was a Dissenting Minister in the middle of the last century, and had grown heavy and gouty by sitting long at dinner and at his studies. He could only get downstairs at last by spreading the folio volumes of Caryl's Commentaries upon Job on the steps and sliding down them. Surprised one day in his descent, he exclaimed, "You have often heard of Caryl upon Job—now you see Job upon Caryl!"

Though I dote on W. H. I am not dotty about him. There are essays in this volume, No. VII in my set of thirteen, that I think I shall not re-read. "On Dr Spurzheim's Theory" and "On the Systems of Hartley and Helvetius" are two of them.

**May 21** Horror, horror, horror! Looking through *Around*  
**Tuesday.** *Cinemas* in bed, I find a passage in which I jot down "a list of a dozen English classics I have not read. *Gulliver's Travels*, *Roderick Random*, *Heart of Midlothian*, *Emma*, *Lothair*, *Wuthering Heights*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Middlemarch*, *Beauchamp's Career*, *Ulysses*, and *The Forsyte Saga*." What is wrong here? They don't tot up to twelve!

Protests are pouring in about my use of the word 'nigger' in last

Saturday's review of Edwin Peeples's novel about negroes, *Swing Low*. It seems I must not use the word 'nigger.' (I had quoted a few lines of my account of Harlem given in *Ego* 8.) One correspondent wrote :

Nobody who knows and understands the negro mind would use that word publicly—that is to say, no white person would do so. Strangely, the coloured people themselves use it frequently, but they have a rooted objection to its use by the white folks. Had your review been published in an American publication you would have been inundated with letters of protest, not only from the coloured people themselves, but also from white people who know the negroes ! The word 'nigger' is a carry-over from the days when unthinking people (*i.e.*, the vast majority) looked down on negroes as being very little if any better than animals—it was a term of contempt. It is still to be heard in the deep South, but no public man would dream of using it in public.

I have replied :

I know all about 'negroes' and 'niggers.' Don't you realise that there is a lilt in "Brown niggers, yellow niggers, pale niggers, black niggers" that is utterly lost if you substitute 'negroes' ? Do you suggest that the old rhyme should be altered to "Ten little negro boys" ? And surely you should have realised that my use of the word 'nigger' was confined to what I had the vanity to regard as a lyrical passage ? That in the rest of the article the word 'negro' was scrupulously adhered to ?

*May 22*            Two letters.    From Dilys Powell :  
*Wednesday.*

14 *Albion Street*  
*Hyde Park, W.2*

MY DEAR JIMMIE,

Your cinema book has been rapturously received in this house. Too rapturously, in fact, for instead of grinding out my usual pieces about cinematography I find myself rushing to read Agate on "Earth" and "The White Hell of Pitz Palu" (and how good I find the Old Maestro !). I need not tell you that my enjoyment is heightened from time to time by paroxysms of disagreement. And, of course, by spasms of pride when I reflect on the dedication. Well, my dear Jimmie, I thank you, I thank you, I thank you, as Bemelmans would say. I am vastly honoured.

Your flattered and devoted,  
DILYS

From George Lyttelton :

*Finndale House  
Grundisburgh  
Suffolk*

MY DEAR JAMES AGATE,

Once again a red-letter day—coinciding with a change of wind to the soft south after a month of the one that Kingsley was so hearty about. Many thanks indeed. I have so far had no time to read more than page 100 (and spot the misprint that made you shudder), as my sister, who hates the cinema, has been reading it all the morning. And the answer to the question why she reads it when caring nothing for its subject is much the same as Stella's about the Dean and a broomstick. What a good page by the way No. 100 is. I agree with it all. Didn't George Moore rise, or was he dead in 1931 ?

By the way, here is a tiny gift for you, who, I know, enjoy examples of human folly. In his history of the American language Mencken writes "the *finicky* and always anti-American Samuel Johnson." I don't know how many English adjectives there are, but I am sure you know practically all of them. Can you think of a sillier one than this ?

Yours ever,  
GEORGE LYTTELTON

P.S. A schoolgirl when asked the question, "In what countries are elephants found?" answered, "Elephants are very large and intelligent animals and are seldom lost." I hope you didn't know that.

*May 23* I once knew a murderer. He was a charming young  
*Thursday.* man, of a gay and debonair manner, and a free and open-handed disposition. Excellent company. Alas ! that when funds ran short he conceived and executed the notion of insuring and setting fire to his mother. Had I been briefed for the defence I should have argued that Sidney Harry Fox was a Dickensian who had been led away by Sam Weller's, "Wery sorry to 'casion any personal inconvenience, ma'am, as the housebreaker said to the old lady when he put her on the fire." He certainly did not belong to the more revolting type of murderer, the poisoner. The point to make about these gentry—not, of course, the kind which poisons for money—is the exquisite depravity of their satisfactions. Neill Cream liked to talk about women, music, money, and poisons. Teignmouth Shore ends his account in the "Notable British Trials" :

His actions were probably governed by a mixture of sexual mania and sadism. He may have had a half-crazy delight in feeling that the lives of the wretched women whom he slew lay in his power, that he was the arbiter of their fates. Sensuality,

cruelty, and lust of power urged him on. We may picture him walking at night the dreary mean streets and byways of Lambeth, seeking for his prey, on some of whom to satisfy his lust, on others to exercise his passion for cruelty ; his drug-sodden, remorseless mind exalted in a frenzy of horrible joy. Whatever exactly he was, the halter was his just reward.

This Famous Trial used to be my favourite bed-book ; there was a time when I knew the names of all his victims in chronological order—Ellen Donworth, Matilda Clover, and so on. The point about this morning's film at the Gaumont is the sexual gratification accorded to any strangler by the act of strangling. Which means that anybody who attempts to make a film on this subject is at once up against the film censor. The strangler's motive being strictly unavowable, some other must obviously be found. What about making him the son of a public hangman, whose fingers owe their peculiar habits to heredity ? That this is all my eye and the late respected Mr Billington won't trouble the one-and-nine-pennies. What might a little incommode them is that the widow of the common hangman should be living in one of Belgravia's costlier mansions. Wherefore it becomes necessary to make the strangler the grandson of a hangman, with a father (deceased) who also showed signs of "strangler's twitch" fortunately kept in control. In other words there is no harm in a film about sexual mania so long as the maniac's motive is not sex. Eric Portman very good.

*May 24* Last night, before sending away the corrected page proofs  
*Friday.* of *The Contemporary Theatre* (1915 and 1919), I had one more quick look through and discovered that I had re-christened Bartók and given him the name of Bella ! This morning I receive a p.c. from George Lyttelton apropos of *Around Cinemas* and my making Johnson say, "Sheer ignorance, ma'am !"

"Sudden fits of inadvertency will surprize vigilance, slight avocations will seduce attention, and casual eclipses of the mind will darken learning."

Not that the old man would have cared a straw and, after all, in the dictionary 'sheer' is an exact synonym for 'pure,' and 'pure' for 'sheer.'

*May 25* Gwen Chenhalls motored me and John Compton to  
*Saturday.* Redhill, where I judged the harness classes at the Surrey County Horse Show ; Colman's Black Magic of Nork won the championship with lots to spare. John is a really modest young man. On Sunday evening last he left his home in

Canterbury at 1 A.M., arrived at St Athans at 6.30, and was in the field at 10.30, taking 5 wickets for 16 runs. Yesterday he took 5 wickets for 6 runs. Total since the season started : 18 wickets for 72 runs. And still doesn't think he is good enough for county cricket.

*May 26* Decided to put my "Shorter Dickens" problem to  
*Sunday.* George Lyttelton, promising myself to abide by his decision. Here it is :

*Finndale House  
Grundisburgh  
Suffolk*

MY DEAR JAMES AGATE,

This is very difficult !—because, *me judice*, you are absolutely right, and so is Alan Dent (thus proving that John Morley was right when he spoke of "the plain maxim that it is possible for the same thing to be and not to be").

*You* say that half a loaf, etc. *He* says, "No, because it is currant bread, and, however you divide it, many epicures will say that the half you have thrown away contains the tastiest currants." A mean metaphor. Let us rise higher and say, Doesn't it all come to this : Are the Dickens novels to be regarded as Holy Writ, which is the argument against abridging the Bible ?—though how we should be spiritually poorer by not knowing that Huz was the brother of Buz I don't know. If you had a committee of Dickensians sitting on each novel the result would be that when they had finished (*a*) they would not be on speaking terms, and (*b*) they would have eliminated about 750 words. I agree with you too about R. West. Dickens is not for very clever women any more than Boswell is. Did, *e.g.*, Virginia Woolf ever mention either, though she had plenty to say about Defoe and Swift and Donne and Hardy ?

It is mainly the length (and the sentiment) which puts off the modern reader. Those who also say that his characters are not true to life and that his humour is long-winded wouldn't read him whether abridged or not, and in Browning's words may be "left in God's contempt apart."

So on the whole I am definitely with you in your arguments. And I should very much like to do one, *Martin Chuzzlewit* for choice if you have not earmarked him. How potent is environment ! Three miles away FitzGerald spent much time cutting down for his own amusement all the masterpieces of English poetry and prose—except Browning, whom he would not read at all.

I hope that my postcard did not make you very cross, and that you will not blast me, as you did that poor man from Berkhamsted, with some withering words about sheer (or pure) pedantry. And you will be quite right.

Yours ever,  
GEORGE LYTTELTON

*May 27* In the wrappings of a parcel of dried fruits sent me by an  
*Monday.* unknown friend in New Zealand I came across this,  
 culled from I know not what paper, date March 2,  
 author H. McD. Vincent :

Roger Blunt, whose batting and bowling figures loom up from the past Plunket Shield and national cricket, has one astounding record which can never be excelled. He once hit 48 runs in an over—eight 6's in a row—a performance duly recorded with that compact and silent vehemence imparted by figures when in the pages of Wisden. There have been mighty hitters in the past, and yet none of them had ever done what Blunt, who was anything but a great hitter, did on that occasion. Watching it was like watching a billiards break by a champion. It seemed natural, inevitable, each stroke coolly conceived and precisely executed. There was no hastiness in it. A man near me said, "He's put the blooming lot over the fence."

Blunt had been ambling along easily, never forcing the pace, in a first-grade club match, when the significant moment came for which (he told me later) he had been waiting. He hooked the first ball over the boundary, did the same with the second, the third he on-drove, the fourth went over cover point's head, the fifth he lifted over square leg, the sixth was an on-drive which just got there, the seventh he hooked, the eighth went beyond the covers.

Variety ? The bowling made it so, for Ernie Caygill, a Riccarton medium-pace change bowler, became flustered, and his deliveries went this way and that, but the essence was that Blunt dealt with each ball scientifically, placing himself for each shot with an air of utter detachment from emotion. Each ball just cleared the boundary, but I have the impression that Blunt in those minutes of calculated endeavour knew exactly where each would land.

When he had ended the crowd seemed to feel the whole thing as anticlimax. It had seen a hitting record made, but it didn't seem as if there had been any real hitting. There had been no lurid moments, no spontaneous applause with each hit, merely interested silence and a feeling of sureness and inevitability.

To me the remarkable aspect about that over was that having planned to do what had never been recorded as having been done by any batsman before, without any excitement, Blunt set about it as a perfectly normal task well within his powers.

He was a deceptive type. His manner on all occasions was so unruffled as to be almost negative ; his refined and polished voice suggested innate gentleness.

Other than his deeds, he gave no hint of an abounding confidence in himself, and of a cold determination in action. By his deeds he is remembered.







**May 28 Tuesday.** To-day has been what I call a full day. Up before nine and wrote 1200 words, being the script for a wireless debate sometime in June on "What is the Value of Dramatic Criticism?" Lunch with Bertie van Thal and a Big Noise in the book-distributing trade, to whom we put up the "Shorter Dickens" proposition. He said that the moment we started on it some big publisher would rush out a complete reissue of the full text and swamp us. Or else some common little fellow would undersell us with a still shorter version, cut by some hack, vilely illustrated, and flaunting a hideous cover. Which means that in current slang 'we've had it.' All I can do now is to break the news of our disappointment to Lyttelton. Back to flat and do so. Rewrite the stuff about Dramatic Criticism. Rush down to Broadcasting House to record my share in to-morrow's "How not to make a Historical Film." (Nothing like a switch of subject to keep the mind active.) Back to flat and have a last look at proofs of *Ego* 8, which Frank Dunn has returned with hundreds of 'marks'! Then to the Unity Theatre to see revivals of the films *The Battleship "Potemkin"* and *Kameradschaft*. Slight giddiness, but pull myself together with a watercress sandwich! Take Gwen Chenhalls to supper and on to a party at Harry Kendall's, where I meet Franklin Dyall and we talk about Irving and what to-day's young playgoers would think if they saw the dying Louis XI come crumbling through the curtains in sky-blue silk.

**May 29 Wednesday.** To-night's broadcast went all right, I think. The way it came about was this. Roy Plomley insisting that I should do it, and I being too busy to write it myself, I gave him *Around Cinemas* and a pile of old *Tattlers* and told him to pretend he was me. Here is the result which I delivered with all possible gusto and the minimum of titivation, Plomley grinning at me a couple of yards away. The debate was ushered in by a spoof-trailer: "Glamorous Guillotine—the film in which the true story of the French Revolution is told for the first time." The film director was played by Alexander Sarnier.

J. A. Folks, my name is Agate—James Agate. Some of you may have heard of me. Among the thousands of films that I have seen in the last twenty years there have been many in the category of the masterpiece which you have just heard. Perhaps the genius who concocted that trailer let his sense of humour get the better of him, but I don't consider that he grossly exaggerated. Exaggerated—but not grossly. On the whole I don't dislike these films. As one of our youngest, and therefore one of our most

intellectual, critics has observed: "Most intelligent people like sometimes to take an evening off and enjoy two hours of passion, blood, and elephants." It worries me very little that Helen of Troy should look and behave like a Ziegfeld Folly, wear a wrist-watch, and have a zip-fastener to her tea-gown—I don't even care if she trails a Pekingese so long as it doesn't obstruct my view of Achilles dragging the body of Hector round the battlefield. Most of these extravaganzas are really Westerns with a different costume, and doubtless they do much to amuse the children. Some grown-up children, too. They shouldn't be judged too harshly. Personally I don't wince when a silk-clad courtier, wearing his sword on the wrong side, says to his peroxide queen, "Ge<sup>a</sup>, your majesty's swell! Thanks a lot!" in the accents of the Bronx. This is O.K. by me. But——

F. D. Mr Agate, if I may interrupt here—I am a director who specialises in historical subjects, and I think that you have only tackled half the issue. You have been talking all this time about the kind of historical film which quite rightly you compare with the Western—the big highly coloured melodramatic jobs with a chase in the last reel. But there are other and more thoughtful historical pictures—biographies—careful and accurate reconstructions of famous historical events.

J. A. So your line is care and accuracy?

F. D. It is.

J. A. Then you, sir, are one of the people I was coming to a minute ago when I said "But," and you rudely interrupted me.

F. D. I apologise.

J. A. I never, never apologise, and I never accept apologies. I was about to say that I forgive historical films on condition that I am not supposed to take them seriously. It is such as you, sir, with your pretended accuracy and your bogus authenticity, that I cannot forgive. Get your personages right and never mind their clothes.

F. D. I don't understand you. Every one of my pictures is the result of months of careful and accurate historical research. Every chair—every table—every footstool—every sofa-cushion. . . .

J. A. Yes, I know. And every antimacassar. Take that recent Wilson film. What the dickens did it matter that the furniture in this picture was an exact reproduction of the furniture in the drawing-room at the White House——

F. D. Leaving that on one side for a moment, history is seldom so obliging as to provide a ready-made film story.

J. A. Now we're coming to it.

F. D. There is no sense in making a film with a dull story. You must have a little licence to change your story around a bit, but you can ensure with care that your background is authentic.

J. A. But if your historical personages can't be as authentic as your background, then you must invent some imaginary ones. And

if you are going to fantasticate the lives of real people why not go the whole hog and make the whole thing fiction?

F. D. I think people like to see real historical personages on the screen.

J. A. Real? I saw recently what was supposed to be a screen biography of a real person—Frédéric Chopin. Showpan, they called him. There is no possible film story in the rather colourless life of that real historical personage—so they made one up, in glorious Technihorror. It was a jumble of nonsense from beginning to end. For example, the film suggested that Chopin toured Italy, Austria, Hungary, Holland, and Denmark to help the starving Poles. Actually, being hard up, he toured Liverpool and Glasgow to help himself!

F. D. That was a musical film rather than an historical one. You can't say they messed up the music.

J. A. They showed us Chopin composing at the age of ten the D Flat Valse which is now known as Opus 64. Then I have memories of a film biography of Marie-Antoinette. All I got from this was that the Queen of France was a pretty woman who looked like Norma Shearer, lived in a large palace, had an affair with a young man, and her head cut off for some reason which was never made clear.

F. D. Very well, you've picked your example—let me pick mine. Take the British picture *Victoria the Great*. I don't think you can find fault with that on its history. It was a very successful picture, and you would be in the minority if you found fault with it.

J. A. I should find fault with it, and I should be in the minority. To be in the majority one must be wrong. But I think we'll leave the old girl out of it. Not enough time for that great figure.

F. D. I shall be interested to read your criticism of the film I'm making at the moment. It's a story of the Norman invasion. With a period as early as that, of course, most of our story has to be supposition—so you won't be able to find fault with us there. We are using 40,000 people for the battle of Hastings, and every piece of armour has been copied from examples in the British Museum.

J. A. Numbers mean nothing. Reinhardt could stage the Thirty Years War with an army of 30 people. The difference between 40,000, 4000, 400, or even 40 people is only in the way you use them. As to the rest, the proper job of a film director is to see that his story is right, shove the film stars about, tell them when to stare at the camera and when not, and explain to them what the words mean. I don't give a fig for your armour. If there was more time I would tell you the old story of the musical-comedy actress who, before she tackled some nonsense about Cleopatra, made herself personally acquainted with every mummy in the British Museum. But there isn't time. They want us to shut up. Glad to have met you.

*May 30*        How can I forget Sarah if other people won't let  
*Thursday.*     me? To-day arrives a photograph of her—enchancing,  
                   amusing, grotesque—sitting under a rock apparently  
 somewhere in Mexico. Date 1911. The covering letter is from the  
 British Embassy in Paris, and asks if I want any others of S. The  
 wrapper is a copy of *Le Charivari* for November 25, 1865. I cull :

M. Victorien Sardou—à mon humble avis un des premiers  
 auteurs dramatiques de ce temps—possède, peut-être à cause de  
 cela, un nombre incalculable d'ennemis.

Et parmi ces ennemis tous des confrères, sans en excepter un,  
 pas même ceux qui ont réellement du talent.

L'un d'eux même, fort dramaturge en disponibilité, à qui l'on  
 reprochait cette faiblesse, répondait l'autre soir :

— Dame, que voulez-vous donc que je déteste à présent,  
 puisque Dumas fils ne fait plus rien !

*May 31*        Letter to a highbrow :  
*Friday.*

DEAR DANIEL GEORGE,

I have been reading your "Alphabet of Literary Prejudice" in the new *Windmill* which, incidentally, makes *Perimeter* and *Arc-en-Ciel* look even sillier than they are. I say nothing about your French accents—English printers have always regarded these as foreign fiddle-faddle.

The point I chiefly want to make concerns the letter Q. Here you say: "Quotations, if used at all, should be used sparingly." Where, if they had taken your advice, would Bacon and Montaigne and Burton have been? And Lamb! What about the wonderful passage in the essay, *In Praise of Chimney-sweepers*, in which Lamb remembers that a bad sweep was once left in a stack with his brush, to indicate which way the wind blew? Elia goes on: "It was an awful spectacle, certainly; not much unlike the old stage direction in *Macbeth*, where the 'Apparition of a child crowned, with a tree in his hand, rises.'" When a writer can do as felicitously as that I don't mind if he is 90 per cent. quotation! The vulgar object to the art because they feel they are being somehow cheated; this is particularly true of newspaper readers, and of the Sunday variety truest of all. They have paid their wretched tuppences, and are determined that their dramatic critic, or whoever it is, shall earn the whole of that tuppence, and not ease up with filchings from other writers. No, sir, in this matter of quotation you are not on the side of the angels.

Talking of angels, you quote, under the letter M, Meredith's

I dream'd a banish'd Angel to me crept :  
 My feet were nourish'd on her breasts all night.

But I have always been told that angels were purely male, and that when Walter Scott wrote his famous

When pain and anguish wring the brow,  
A ministering angel thou !

he was taking an unpardonable liberty. And surely if there are she-angels there must be she-devils, and I have never thought that some of those red-tailed little things that in the next world are going to prod one with toasting-forks will be females. And then we must be consistent. What about she-archangels, and discovering that one of them is Mrs Humphry Ward ? I fancy that these he-shes would come into Elia's category of *male aunts*.

By the way, under N, one living Novelist you ought to read is Hugh Edwards. Bennett or Gosse or Montague, anyhow somebody, is supposed to have said that if there were only one copy of a really good book, and it was dropped in the middle of the Sahara, it would still somehow or other contrive to be rescued from oblivion and ultimately find its public. I feel that this is true about *All Night at Mr Stanyhurst's*. Reviewing this, I said, "So far as my reading goes, this is the best long story or short novel since Conrad." Whereupon half a dozen readers wrote to say that the book had nothing in common with Conrad. But this was merely to be expected ; one has only to say that somebody has written the best long-short poem since *The Ancient Mariner* to be told that the comparison is vitiated because the new work is not about albatrosses. And that's all, except that I have been going about the house all day repeating your admirable line, "Over the cool black begonias the giraffe coughed abruptly."

To conclude. I have read your Alphabet, and indeed the whole magazine, with the greatest interest and amusement, and I don't mean this in Fluther Good's "derogatory" sense. But I forget that you don't like quotations.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

*June 1* In the middle of *Portrait in Black* I found myself  
*Saturday.* wondering about Shakespeare's play. Did there never come a time when Lady Macbeth, who was not sleeping well, turned to her husband and said with another intonation, "What beast was't then That made you break this enterprise to me ?" Did Macbeth never remind his spouse of his resolve to proceed no further, and how she had egged him on with all that talk of cats in adages and babies' boneless gum ? Sat up late last night turning this into Sunday's article, after playing with the idea of finding a parallel in Abel Hermant's *La Fameuse Comédienne*, to which some of this play's incidents bear a superficial resemblance. "Monsieur," says the fifth-rate actress to her former lover, ex-"télégraphiste" in Montmartre,

"if ever I deceive my husband it will not be with the father of my child!" Doubt, however, whether the chaste columns of the *S.T.* are quite the place for this. I still dote on A. H.'s book, the one and only procurable copy of which I gave to Jock some ten years ago. This, however, is now back with me, "on permanent loan," and forms part of my bedside library—the trials of Neill Cream and William Herbert Wallace, the stories of Damon Runyon and Dorothy Parker, Saki's *The Unbearable Bassington*.

Was roused by an Apparition in mink standing at my bedside. It was Gwen Chenhalls come to motor me to the Royal Windsor Horse Show. With her was Tahu Hole, a large, pleasant man, and great-nephew of Dean Hole. Lunched in the car—cold turtle soup, pâté de foie gras sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, chocolate, and whiskey. Their Majesties present at the Show, and the championship won by Colman's Black Magic. How good a horse is he? I put him second to Field Marshal, of whom Geoffrey Bennett wrote in his *Famous Harness Horses*: "On his day few horses that have ever lived could withstand him. His quality and conformation were almost faultless, the carriage of his lovely neck superb, and his action so high, so balanced, so natural, and so true—a real aristocrat!" Black Magic lacks a little, but only a little, of the *elegance* of the older horse, and it is in my mind that he does not put his knee quite so high. But he takes rank with Field Marshal as one of the six best performers I have ever seen, the other four being the brown mare Charm, the gelding Black Capenor, the bay mare Modern Maid, and a certain bright bay gelding which I need not name.

*Winged Words.* No. 14: In Barking there may be nowadays few windmills to tilt at; it may be difficult to find a Sancho Panza.

*Leading article. Evening paper*

*June 2* The Preface to *Around Cinemas* published to-morrow,  
*Sunday.* contains these words:

This book is not intended to be documentary, educational, didactic, comprehensive. It sets forth no æsthetic theory of the film. It is in no sense a history. . . . The principle on which I have chosen my little essays? Not according to the importance of their subject-matter, but according to my liking for what I have written.

Which doesn't prevent the *New Statesman* from writing: "The reader will be disappointed who expects to find here a coherent perspective of the cinema as such. Still, there's a pretty water-colour of



Lillian Gish." The reviewer ? G. W. Stonier, always so good when he is not writing about me. The *Daily Herald* (John Betjeman) is ecstatic, and Harold Hobson writes in the *Sunday Times* : " We are able to witness, through a space of nearly a quarter of a century, the æsthetic development of Mr Agate. It is a fascinating and infinitely amusing occupation." Perhaps I am best pleased by a line in Monica Dickens's review in the *Sunday Chronicle*—a line about my ungullible critical faculty. " Ungullible " is the word I have been waiting for.

In the afternoon Gwen Chenhalls, who has taken up her appointment as Chauffeuse Extraordinary to Queen Alexandra Mansions, motored me to Farnham Royal to take tea with John Clements, whose father, a delightful old gentleman with silver hair, does not see eye to eye with his son about acting. Meaning that he regards Irving as the greatest actor he has ever seen or is likely to see, while John, who never saw H. I., won't go further than that he was " a great but not a good actor." And I think of Chesterton on Dickens :

Whatever the word ' great ' means, Dickens was what it means. Even the fastidious and unhappy, who cannot read his books without a continuous critical exasperation, would use the word of him without stopping to think. They feel that Dickens is a great writer even if he is not a good writer.

Came away with a volume of *The Theatre* for 1880, edited by Clement Scott, containing an account of Ellen Terry's first appearance as Beatrice, at Leeds, and another of Sarah Bernhardt in *Froufrou*. Also a comparative estimate of Rachel and Sarah by one who had seen both in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. This teems with wrong accents, and there is also the statement that the lines hurled by Adrienne at her rival are from *Phèdre*. I would have wagered my right hand that they are from *Bajazet*. And now, alas ! I shall never know. Maurice Baring is dead, the play is unprocurable, and somebody has borrowed my unique copy of the now out-of-print Legouvé's *Mémoires*.

June 3      In a letter from Ivor Brown :  
Monday.

I haven't had time yet for *Around Cinemas*. It shall to my bedside. Meanwhile I thank you for the compliment to my golf, never justified and now merely a mockery. But I did beat a nice young swifter the other day who got on to every green in two and then took three putts, while I achieved the holes in four shots of equal length, a form of resort to the 800 yards' drive which ultimately destroys all resolution and self-control. But then one has to keep holing the final hundred-yarder—a strain, but I managed it.

At 2 P.M., just as I was thinking about lunch, received this wire from Jock :

Have to deliver yet unwritten lecture at Stratford Thursday morning entitled *The Truth about Shakespeare*. Please send me amusing and characteristic note on subject and so help me out.

Went to the Ivy, had chats with Arthur Rank and Douglas Byng, and back to the flat at 3 P.M. Dictated Note, which Booth-Palmer typed with so much comprehension and celerity that we managed to catch the 6.30 post.

### NOTE FOR JOCK

So you have let yourself in for *The Truth about Shakespeare* ? A *tour de force* to accomplish which you would have to know all about (a) Truth and (b) Shakespeare. Though, like Lady Macbeth, thou'rt innocent of the knowledge, dearest Jock, I still applaud the intention. Here is a Note for you to re-deliver after what flourish your nature will.

To whom are you supposed to lecture ?<sup>c</sup> Fiji Islanders ? Esquimaux ? Or the kind of wild and woolly American about whom John Clements told me this story when I had tea with him the other day at Farnham Royal ? (Has it ever struck you that though the Yanks can invent charming names like "Abe's Top Hat" for their home towns they, being poor benighted republicans, cannot call anything "Royal" ?) Having now put you on the worst of terms with your audience, let me tell you John Clements's story. The scene was a camp concert. He appeared before the curtains and announced a recitation of "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more." Whereupon a burly G.I. in the second row buried his face in his hands and said, "Christ !" John recited the speech, at the end of which the same G.I. jumped to his feet, applauding wildly and crying, "Jesus !"

Well, what are you going to tell your young friends ? I should feel inclined to say something like this :

Shakespeare was not a crashing bore like the whole of Corneille and nine-tenths of Racine.

Shakespeare is the most exciting dramatist the world has ever seen, the runner-up being Ibsen.

Of all playwrights Shakespeare is the one who most often "takes your breath away, or sends a momentary wave of coldness across your face, or elicits whatever your special bodily signal may be of your mind's amazed and sudden surrender to some stroke of passionate genius." Montague, of course. And perhaps you'd better explain who Montague was.

Still continuing with what you could say, you might remind these boys that Shakespeare wrote two plays in one of which, *Hamlet*, no actor has been known to fail, while in the other, *Macbeth*,

no actor has been known to succeed. I find it very difficult to place the five major tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*—in their proper order. I think perhaps the thing to say of them is what one says of Beethoven's piano concertos, that whichever you are listening to at the moment is the best. I was sitting the other night at *Macbeth*, where my senses were assaulted by that sequence beginning

To be thus is nothing ;  
But to be safely thus : our fears in Banquo  
Stick deep ;

and ending

Light thickens, and the crow  
Makes wing to the rooky wood :  
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,  
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.

Followed immediately by the banqueting scene, on the heels of which came the scene with the Witches and the show of Kings.

Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo : down !  
Thy crown does sear mine eye-balls. And thy hair,  
Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first.  
A third is like the former. Filthy hags !  
Why do you show me this ?

And I found myself wondering whether the whole range of drama has anything to show like this, including *Hamlet's* Advice to the Players, the Play-Scene, and the scene in Gertrude's closet. Would you like to tell your listeners what I think is the greatest or perhaps the most visually and aurally exciting line in the whole of drama ? I find this not in *Macbeth*, but in *Hamlet*. It occurs in Act I, Scene 1. Bernardo is chatting to Horatio and Marcellus on "a platform before the castle" :

Last night of all,  
When yond same star that's westward from the pole  
Had made his course to illume that part of heaven  
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
*The bell then beating one,—*

I have put the last line in italics, and you must read it that way, for this is the line I mean. What is there so remarkable about it ? Simply that it breaks off, and the stage direction is "Enter Ghost." Imagine the effect of the first appearance of the Ghost at that first performance !

But I may be getting too serious. This may be not at all the kind of thing you are wanting to hear. Do you want me to reopen the Shakespeare Bacon controversy ? I am as firm against this as the authorities are firm against opening the grave at Stratford. Nevertheless there is a little story which is not un-apropos :

A publican desired an artist to paint him a sign. The artist agreed, saying he had long wanted to paint a red lion. The publican preferred a white horse. The artist stood his ground, and for a

time they wrangled, until finally the publican pointed out that it was he who was paying for the sign. "If you put it like that," said the artist, "you shall have a white horse. *But don't be surprised if it looks like a red lion!*"

It has always seemed to me odd, to say the least of it, that Shakespeare, if he was not Bacon, should have been at such enormous pains to make it possible for subsequent generations to think that he was. For example. Everybody now listening to you must know Cardinal Wolsey's lines in *Henry VIII* first published in the Folio of 1623 :

O Cromwell, Cromwell !  
Had I but serv'd my God with half the zeal  
I serv'd my King, he would not in mine age  
Have left me naked to mine enemies.

Isn't it a trifle curious that shortly after Bacon fell from power in 1621 he wrote a letter to King James in which this occurs : "Cardinal Wolsey said that if he had pleased God as he had pleased the King he had not been ruined."

Again—and once more I am indebted to my friend Edward D. Johnson—I hold it queer that "in the play *Troilus and Cressida* we find the following words :

Not much  
Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought  
Unfit to hear moral philosophy.

The point here is that Aristotle never said any such thing, that he spoke of *political* philosophy, not *moral* philosophy. In *The Advancement of Learning* Bacon quotes Aristotle as saying, 'Young men are no fit auditors of *moral* philosophy.' " Edward D. Johnson thinks it an odd coincidence, and I agree with him, that both Shakespeare and Bacon should make the same mistake when quoting Aristotle. But there, I don't think it matters. The plays are the thing, and I don't care two hoots who wrote them. They have afforded me more delight than all the operas, all the art galleries, all the books I've read, all the rounds of golf I've played, all the ponies I've shown, all the whiskey, and all the cigars.

I end what I hope your audience will not have found dull with two quotations from a writer whom you and I cherish almost to absurdity. This is Logan Pearsall Smith. And here is the first quotation :

"Of all of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* is the most Shakespearian in the more sombre meaning of the epithet, and in the word 'Macbeth' as we evoke it, we see the splash of blood ; dreadful shapes appear and flicker, dimly, as in dim crystal-gazing ; Macbeth steals to Duncan's chamber, the inexplicable Third Murderer silently draws near the scene of murder ; Banquo's ghost sits at the feast, shaking his gory locks in silence, and Lady Macbeth moves and mutters in her sleep."

The second quotation is :

"In one of the greatest passages he wrote—and Prospero's speech has been described as the finest passage in Shakespeare, if not in all the literature in the world—I find the expression of one aspect, and to me the most essential aspect, of Shakespeare's spirit. Best of all, I love those plays, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, and *The Tempest*, which, like the *Sonnets* with their shimmering moods, are silvery-tinted with this cast of thought. To dream, to meditate, to lose ourselves in thought beyond the reaches of our souls, to love the gay appearances of the world and know them as illusions—this temper of an ironic mind, of a happy, enjoying, and yet melancholy nature, expresses itself in a secret rhythm, a cadence, a delicate and dream-like music which is, for me, the loveliest poetry of the world."

So you see, my dear Jock, that, like others, our old friend is divided against himself. He cannot decide between the blood and thunder of *Macbeth* and the, may I say, urbanity of *Hamlet*. The truth about Shakespeare is that he is a world, and that no standard exists by which to measure the smoky tumult of Vesuvius against the Mediterranean's blue serenity.

June 5            A letter :  
Wednesday.

DEAR CHRISTOPHER FRY,

It is very nice to hear from you, and I have the pleasantest recollection of our meetings at Oxford. Since then you have taken to the poetic drama, which alters things. I don't believe that there has been a poet with any sense of drama since Shakespeare, and I don't believe there is any dramatist living to-day with any sense of poetry. Or any poet either. How can I lunch with, for example, a man who thinks

Our life is urban but its core is sex  
Wherefore a city's centre is its shops,  
Its cafés, restaurants, theatres, and all places  
Where men and women touch upon this power—  
A city is, in short, life's choicest bower.

is poetry ? Suppose I were to write

Thank you, dear Fry, for your kind invitation  
The Carlton Grill would suit me mighty fine,  
Though, for myself, I think the Café Royal,  
Where, since they know me, I can get a table.  
Yes. I'll be right on time. That's if I'm able.

Would you think that poetry ?

I wish you hadn't turned dramatic poet. I detest, abhor, execrate, and give your kind to sixscore thousand devils, as in no instance to be excused or tolerated, but shunned as universal vipers, to be branded, proscribed, and spoken evil of. As Elia

would say, in no way can I be brought to digest you ! And why must you fellows all write plays with titles like *Turn Right for the Crematorium* ? Is there no other subject in the world except death ? I suppose that, being youngish, you still think death is great fun. I am oldish, and don't.

Ever,  
JAMES AGATE

*June 6 Thursday.* As though the task of reducing to critical coherence Alec Guinness's adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, which I saw at the Lyric, Hammer-smith, last night, were not already sufficiently difficult, the air authorities responsible for Victory Day celebrations chose Holborn and my working hours this morning for a rehearsal. Groups of aircraft flew over my roof like coveys of partridges. To drown them I put on Weber's *Euryanthe* Overture with my loudest needle. During which I settled down to make up my mind whether Valk, who played old Karamazov, is or is not a great actor. Decided in the affirmative, and if I am wrong shall attribute it to the simultaneous arrival of three men, one to cut my hair, and two to dry-clean my carpets by the noisiest process known. In the middle of it all I have occasion to refer to *Red-letter Nights* and my notice of the Quintero Brothers' play, *Fortunato*. And there, bung in the middle of the page, I find a dreadful misprint—"dévotée enragée." Which means that I become *enragé* without being *dévo*t. Is there then no end to it ? Go out to lunch, drink a bottle of champagne to restore brain-tissue, and come back to find a perfect article. Except that I rewrite it twice more.

*Winged Words.* No. 15 : " Evelyn Keyes' legs are looking particularly svelte these days. She contends it is because she is wearing garters that belonged to Mistinguett."

*Film gossip*

*June 7 Friday.* The *Daily Herald*—some of the other national papers having turned it down—prints the following little poem, a reassertion of something I wrote some years ago. Set in what is known by printers and newspaper men as a ' box,' and away from comic drawings and the like :

FOR THE FALLEN

God keep you, Jack, Harry, and Ben !  
You fought for Christ's kingdom, and then—  
There's no more to your story  
Save the power, and the glory,  
For ever and ever.—Amen.

*V-Day.* Some little time ago the makers of Basildon Bond newspaper held a competition for the Best Letter Written by a Member of the Forces during the recent war. The Judges were Margery Anderson, Commander Campbell, and J. A., the film-critic of the *Tatler*. The writer of the winning entry was the twenty-two-year-old

Pte. I. Rowbery 4928327  
2nd S. Staffs Regt. (Signal Section)  
Att. 1st Airborne Division.

He was killed at Arnheim. This letter by a Wolverhampton working lad moves me more than some more celebrated literary efforts, and I am grateful to the boy's mother for her permission to reproduce it, "because it may help other parents." There was a covering envelope marked : "To the Best Mother in the World."

*Blighty*  
*Some time ago*

DEAR MOM,

Usually when I write a letter it is very much overdue, and I make every effort to get it away quickly. This letter, however, is different. It is a letter I hoped you would never receive, as it is just a verification of that terse black-edged card which you received some time ago, and which has caused you so much grief. It is because of that grief that I wrote this letter, and by the time you have finished reading it I hope that it has done some good, and that I have not written it in vain.

It is very difficult to write now of future things in the past tense, so I am returning to the present.

To-morrow we go into action. As yet we do not know exactly what our job will be, but no doubt it will be a dangerous one in which many lives will be lost—mine may be one of those lives.

Well, Mom, I am not afraid to die. I like this life, yes—for the past two years I have planned and dreamed and mapped out a perfect future for myself. I would have liked that future to materialise, but it is not what I will but what God wills, and if by sacrificing all this I leave the world slightly better than I found it I am perfectly willing to make that sacrifice. Don't get me wrong though, Mom; I am no flag-waving patriot, nor have I ever professed to be.

England's a great little country—the best there is—but I cannot honestly and sincerely say "that it is worth fighting for." Nor can I fancy myself in the role of a gallant crusader fighting for the liberation of Europe. It would be a nice thought, but I would only be kidding myself. No, Mom, my little world is centred around you, and includes Dad, every one at home, and my friends at W'ton—that is worth fighting for—and if by doing so it

strengthens your security and improves your lot in any way, then it is worth dying for too.

Now this is where I come to the point of this letter. As I have already stated, I am not afraid to die, and am perfectly willing to do so, if, by my doing so, you benefit in any way whatsoever. If you do not then my sacrifice is all in vain. Have you benefited, Mom, or have you cried and worried yourself sick? I fear it is the latter. Don't you see, Mom, that it will do me no good, and that in addition you are undoing all the good work I have tried to do. Grief is hypocritical, useless, and unfair, and does neither you nor me any good.

I want no flowers, no epitaph, no tears. All I want is for you to remember me and feel proud of me; then I shall rest in peace, knowing that I have done a good job. Death is nothing final or lasting; if it were there would be no point in living; it is just a stage in every one's life. To some it comes early, to others late, but it must come to every one some time, and surely there is no better way of dying.

Besides I have probably crammed more enjoyment into my 21 years than some manage to do in 80. My only regret is that I have not done as much for you as I would have liked to do. I loved you, Mom; you were the best Mother in the World, and what I failed to do in life I am trying to make up for in death, so please don't let me down, Mom, don't worry or fret, but smile, be proud and satisfied. I never had much money, but what little I have is all yours. Please don't be silly and sentimental about it, and don't try to spend it on me. Spend it on yourself or the kiddies, it will do some good that way. Remember that where I am I am quite O.K., and providing I know that you are not grieving over me I shall be perfectly happy.

Well, Mom, that is all, and I hope I have not written it all in vain.

Good-bye, and thanks for everything.

Your unworthy son,

IVOR

*Whit Sunday.* Would that Hazlitt had written an essay "On the Muddleheadedness of Reviewers"! Lejeune in the *Observer* spoils a dithyrambic notice of *Around Cinemas* by saying:

The author takes an obstinate delight in divagation, turning from Mickey Rooney to Trabb's boy, withdrawing with frank relief from a consideration of Norma Talmadge to a memory of Sarah Bernhardt, wandering from his assigned subject to random reflections on the theatre, the novel, the world of music, and the field of sport.

*Random*, dear Lejeune? In the dictionary sense of haphazard, without settled direction or purpose? Without knowing where I am



going ? But I always know where I am going, and with what object. There is one view of St Paul's Cathedral from Ludgate Circus and another view from Blackfriars Bridge, and in any article I write on the Cathedral I am as likely as not to shift my viewpoint and, in the course of shifting, throw in a few observations on circuses and bridges. But the second viewpoint is never lost sight of, and will be established at the end, to the astonishment of the reader who hasn't perceived that all my roads lead to St Paul's. According to Lejeune I must not refer to Sarah even when the Talmadge is making nonsense of *La Dame aux Camélias*. And why does she lead with the Mickey Rooney—Trabb's boy comparison ? Doesn't she see that this is my ace of trumps ? That I do not stray into the Sarah country while discussing Mickey, or lug Trabb's boy into my adventures with the Talmadge ?

How does Trabb's boy come into my Mickey Rooney article ?

What is the reason for the extraordinary Rooney-resistance of which I have been conscious for some time ? Or, as we should say over here, this dead-set against Mickey not by the public, which to see him in *Babes on Broadway* filled the Empire to overflowing five times on Tuesday last, but on the part of the highbrow critics ? Of this young man's technical accomplishments there can be no doubt. His sense of humour is generally conceded. His overpowering pathos in *Boys' Town* and half a dozen other films must be obvious to anybody who is not blind, deaf, and dumb in the worst sense. He sings enough to eke out Miss Judy Garland whenever the director mistakenly thinks that young lady requires eking out. He plays the banjo with a virtuosity this country knows nothing about. He is a poor mimic, and his efforts in the present film to impersonate Carmen Miranda, Sir Harry Lauder, and Richard Mansfield merely show a greedy director anxious to get from a super-willing horse rather more than it can give. Yet there is no doubt to my mind that within strict limits Mickey is a great actor. He can keep still. He can listen. He can let you know what is going on in his mind without pulling faces. He has geniality. Nature and not the sound-director has put the tears into his voice. And he has the one quality by which all great actors are known—that you can't keep your eyes off him. Is he pocket-size ? Then this snub-nosed little tough is a great actor in miniature . . .

Here I want to make a point which in my view has not been sufficiently considered by our high priestesses of the fine shades. This is Rooney's power to exuberate. And to exuberate is woe-fully lacking in the acting world to-day. Here is Quintessential Boy, and perhaps the reader will care to look with me again at something G. K. Chesterton wrote on the subject :

"The scene in which Trabb's boy continually overtakes Pip in order to reel and stagger as at a first encounter is a thing quite within the real competence of such a character ; it might have been suggested by Thackeray, or George Eliot, or any realist. But the point with Dickens is that there is a rush in the boy's rushings ; the writer and the reader rush with him. They start with him, they share an inexpressible vitality in the air which emanates from this violent and capering satirist. Trabb's boy is among other things a boy ; he has a physical rapture in hurling himself like a boomerang and in bouncing to the sky like a ball."

I take it that it is the *bounce* of Trabb's boy which offends my colleagues, who appear to feel as the Misses Lavinia and Clarissa Spenslow might have felt if this amazing human combustion engine had come bouncing and boomeranging into their decorous, birdcage existence. In the present film Mr Rooney exuberates more than I have ever seen him exuberate ; he exudes more energy, more magnetism, more *life* than all the other characters in the film put together. But he should never impersonate.

Now let's get this thing straight. Does the "illustration from Dickens give a reader who has never seen Rooney a better idea of him ? Does it add to what I have to say about him ? *If it does it is not divagation.*

*Whit Monday.* The last seventy-two hours have been a day-mare. I disentangle :

1. The arrival of John Compton in the middle of the celebrations on V-Day. Had the typescript of *Those Were the Nights* arrived, and did I want any help in titivating ? I said yes to both. Which resulted in my spending an entirely happy day instead of getting into a black (and childish) rage because of all the people in London only I want to work. This should be called Agate's Disease.

2. A good notice of *Around Cinemas* in the *Manchester Guardian*. The reviewer thinks the book wants a few footnotes : "Witty by-play with names, events, and catch-phrases which were in every reader's mind at the time of reading Mr Agate's weekly column is by now sometimes frankly incomprehensible." Meaning that people have forgotten those advertisements signed "Callisthenes."

8. Deleting a quip from my notice of Alec Guinness's production of *The Brothers Karamazov*—"Alec Guinness is good for you !" But my win for good taste did not end here. Also deleted the remark that Ernest Milton's Father Zossima is twin brother to Hermione Gingold's King Lear.

4. Amusing notices of Michael Tippett's Symphony played by the





National Symphony Orchestra under Walter Goehr at the Central Hall :

*The Times*

This experiment at any rate is not convincing that two historically different manners can be brought into a modern synthesis—the result is too drab.

*The News Chronicle*

It is unusual music, of a kind that will never bring into play the emotions of any but those who are moved by manifestations of the exploring mind. As such, the symphony is an illustration of the strange power of abstract thought to convey beauty to the watchful observer. It will never be a popular work, but it will continue to touch the widespread few profoundly.

*The Daily Express*

The texture of the music (as a disciple explained in the programme) "is often polyphonic, meaning that there may be two or three lines of melody at one time." There are, indeed, moments when it suggests four different radio programmes played in four adjoining flats.

Nostalgically I bethink me of the days when William Glock, in the *Observer*, tipped us Tippett week after week. And I write a sonnet, or at least the beginning of one :

William ! thou shouldst be Glockenspieling now :  
Tippett hath need of thee . . .

5. A letter from a W.R.N.S. officer :

With reference to *Ego* 7, Page 302 (this is the Naval formula for every sort of letter), you, for once, are wrong and Dean Inge is right. The bad man never does reach satiety : instead of sating his desire he destroys it. It's all in *Macbeth*, from the murder of Banquo onwards. I know one ought not to think of Iago outside the framework of the play, but suppose he had got away with it and tried again : he would have been caught by the law of Diminishing Returns and found that he got less and less excitement out of it all each time.

" . . . The Metaphysicals, and Milton beyond 'hem, went even beyond Shakespeare, for they imagined hell, and whatever may be thought of the doctrine of hell theologically and morally, it is a very great poetic idea. Shakespeare's people were able—they were compelled—altogether to die. Lear, outraging nature, was outraged by nature, but he died. Macbeth, self-robbed of sleep, found a living somnambulism, but he died. They glanced at that other vision in moments—'Hell is murky.' But it is Satan whose everlasting and hopeless desire restored the full vision to English verse,

the 'perishing everlastingly' of that great ode the Athanasian Creed.

I would be at the worst : worst is my port,  
My harbour, and my ultimate repose,

and he cannot be."

(*New Book of English Verse*, Introduction)

6. A second photograph of Sarah sent by my unknown friend at the British Embassy in Paris. This time as Lorenzaccio—delicious, enchanting, and supremely silly—the pose suited to Yvonne Printemps as Mozart. But then Sarah could be adorably silly, as when, in *Les Cathédrales*, after Amiens, Bourges, and Notre-Dame de Paris had announced their booming selves, she put on her most winsome smile and said, "Je suis la Cathédrale de Strasbourg," with the purr of a delighted kitten.

7. An unknown friend in Oxford sends me in return for my "serendipitous wit" a poem entitled *The River Thames*, by John William Pitt. This describes the river from source to mouth, and my friend calls it "remarkable." This is, I feel, to do less than justice to a work showing that, in poetry as in everything else, where there's a will there's a way. I cull three stanzas :

Famed Oxford, fifty-four miles from the source of "Father Thames,"  
Possesses many colleges, all architectural gems ;  
The chief ones being Christ Church, Hertford, Pembroke, Jesus, Queen's,  
Corpus Christi, Magdalen, all great men's boyhood scenes,  
And not forgetting Worcester, Merton, Trinity, and New,  
And Keble, Brasenose, Oriel, St John's, and Lincoln, too.

Adjoining is the chapel which by Henry VIII (eighth) was built,  
But which good Queen Victoria, lest memory should wilt  
Of Albert, her beloved Consort, lavishly restored,  
In permanent memorial of Britain's princely lord.  
This is the final resting-place of Duke of Clarence, who,  
As Britain's heir-presumptive, died in 1892.

Not far below is Twickenham (upon the left-hand side),  
A pleasant London suburb, which still takes especial pride  
In having been the residence of several famous men,  
Who earned the nation's gratitude, remembered by their pen.  
When Poet Laureate, Lord Tennyson was living here,  
And, eke, that Dickens, Swift, and Pope were residents is clear.

8. See an imbecile film called *Bedelia*, in which a husband will not believe that his wife, who has already disposed of three husbands for their insurance money, is proposing to murder him, until he sees the cat, which has eaten of the fish intended for supper, turn on its back and die under his nose. Spend half the evening wondering by what economic or ethical or æsthetic law I should be compelled to

waste my time. And then something clicks in my brain, I take down Wilde's *Intentions*, and I read :

Criticism is no more to be judged by any low standard of imitation or resemblance than is the work of poet or sculptor. The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought. He does not even require for the perfection of his art the finest materials. Anything will suit his purpose. And just as out of the sordid and sentimental amours of the silly wife of a small country doctor in the squalid village of Yonville-l'Abbaye, near Rouen, Gustave Flaubert was able to create a classic, and make a masterpiece of style, so, from subjects of little or no importance, such as the pictures in this year's Royal Academy, or in any year's Royal Academy for that matter, Mr Lewis Morris's poems, M. Ohnet's novels, or the plays of Mr Henry Arthur Jones, the true critic can, if it be his pleasure so to direct or waste his faculty of contemplation, produce work that will be flawless in beauty and instinct with intellectual subtlety. Why not ? To an artist so creative as the critic, what does subject-matter signify ?

Had Wilde been living to-day he would doubtless have added films to the base metal which a creative critic can turn into gold.

9. May and my brother-in-law, Wilfrid Grantham, to the rescue. When Wilfrid was writing his play about Rachel he got a friend of his in Paris to refer to the MS. of Scribe and Legouvé's *Adrienne Lecouvreur* to find out what passage from the classics Adrienne had declaimed. (See entry for June 2.) He was told that it was from that drama, begun by Molière and finished by Corneille, entitled *Psyché*. Act III, Scene 3, beginning at :

Ne les détournes point, ces yeux qui m'empoisonnent.

My edition of Molière has this footnote : " L'auteur de *Cinna* fit, à l'âge de *soixante-cinq ans*, cette déclaration de Psyché à l'Amour, qui passe pour un des morceaux les plus tendres et les plus naturels qui soient au théâtre. (Voltaire.) "

But, May adds, these lines, which were good enough for Rachel, didn't satisfy Sarah when she made her own version of the play. Referring to this in *L'Illustration Théâtrale*, she finds that Sarah did, in fact, substitute a passage out of *Phèdre*—the famous

Oui, prince je languis, je brûle pour Thésée,

from Act II, Scene 5, to which she tacked on the equally famous

Hélas ! ils se voyoient avec pleine licence,

from Act IV, Scene 6.

10. Letter from Guy Deghy reproaching me for not replying to one of his. Ends: "And after all this just a quotation from Anatole France (to remind you, for no doubt you know it): 'La vertu comme le corbeau niche dans les ruines.'"

11. Reply to Deghy:

Since May 10 I have corrected the proofs of two books; written, or rather put together, two more; turned down a project for shortening the novels of Charles Dickens (after sitting up the whole of one night cutting *Pickwick*); reviewed my own book in the *Express*; delivered one broadcast and prepared another; written an article for an American magazine (they rejected it because what they wanted was guff about the Little Theatre Movement and I wrote what I thought); written two more articles for Glasgow and West Hampstead which were accepted, not to say gobbled up; jotted down notes for a lecture Alan Dent was to give to Americans at Stratford; presided over the Hackney Society's Show at Crewe, judged at another show and attended a third; visited a sick friend at Haywards Heath and one who was not sick at Farnham Royal; entered up my Diary; made six enemies, and had a tooth out; all this in addition to my usual work. And you want me to answer letters. Go and croak yourself hoarse under your own battlements, you old raven!

12. The *Times* musical critic writes about the two Prize Symphonies—Cedric Thorpe Davie's Symphony in C major and Bernard Stevens's Symphony of Liberation: "What was lacking in both was a great tune that would have provided a true climax embodying our joy and thankfulness and resolution." *A great tune?* What does this critic expect after he and his kind have been shoving Bartók down our native composers' throats for years. *A true climax?* But when Tchaikowsky produces one it is impressed upon us that he is, like the wretched greengrocer at the Bath swarry, a low thief and an unreclaimable blaygaird.

13. Letter from a lady in Portuguese East Africa saying that "the monotony of life in this empty hole"—what about giraffes, hippopotamuses, the Portuguese?—"is broken only by my husband's chuckles over *A Shorter Ego*. I ask to be allowed to share the fun, and am told that I shouldn't understand."

14. A delightful lunch with Christopher Fry, at which we discussed everything except the poetic drama.

15. Arrival of a large, rich plum cake, the gift of a lady in Adelaide.



*June 12* Took Cedric Hardwicke to see *Beware of Pity*, in which  
*Wednesday.* he co-stars with Albert Lieven, Gladys Cooper, and  
 Lilli Palmer. All about how an Alpine climber is under  
 a moral obligation to marry any girl without legs. Or something  
 equally silly. (I am told that Stefan Zweig's novel says the exact  
 opposite.) Cedric in great form at lunch. Said of a *very* eminent  
 American statesman that Americans, meaning New-Yorkers, look on  
 him as they would look on a piano-player in a brothel who did not  
 know what was going on upstairs.

*June 18* On Tuesday at 3.15 P.M. I had the bright idea of  
*Thursday.* a sequel to *Around Cinemas*, started by something  
 Lejeune wrote about hoping the first volume wouldn't  
 be the last. Eighteen years of the *Tatler* at fifty articles a year means  
 that I had nine hundred to choose from for the first book. Take  
 away ninety and there still remains eight hundred. I decided the  
 milk would stand another creaming. 'Phoned Bertie van Thal to  
 come over at once and concur. Which he did at 3.25. The book was  
 delivered at 4.30 P.M. to-day. Is that all I did in the forty-eight  
 hours? It is not. I attended one cinema and one theatre, and wrote  
 articles for the *Tatler* and the *Express*.

*June 14* The Gentle Art once more. Letter to the Musical Critic  
*Friday.* of the *News Chronicle* :

DEAR SCOTT GODDARD,

I suggest that other things come home to roost besides chickens  
 and curses. For example, musical criticisms. You write in to-day's  
*News Chronicle* :

"Handel's *Solomon*, which contains some of the loveliest of his  
 choruses, is so rarely given that the elect crowd to hear any per-  
 formance. They make a small crowd these days; the Albert Hall  
 was miserably empty last night, an interesting illustration of the  
 present state of musical taste in London."

Well, what can you expect after shoving Bartók and the rest of the  
 cacophonous crew down the throats of our young people? For it  
 is the young people who go to concerts nowadays. You are not  
 quite as bad as the *Times* man who, when he writes of Tchaikowsky  
 or Richard Strauss, gives the impression that he has been in touch  
 with defilement and abomination.

I keep a pretty close eye on you, my friend. Do you remember  
 a day or two ago cracking up Tippett's Symphony as "a mani-  
 festation of an exploring mind," and "the strange power of abstract  
 thought to convey beauty to the watchful observer"? Whereupon

I imagine the following conversation between two young persons, watchful observers of your column :

FIRST Y. P. I see they're giving Handel's *Solomon*. What about it ?

SECOND Y. P. What about what ?

FIRST Y. P. Going to hear it.

SECOND Y. P. My dear, you must be nuts. Handel's nothing but tune. No abstract thought. *His mind just doesn't explore !*

Looking forward to reading you on Toscanini when he comes.

Yours ever,

JAMES AGATE

Followed by letter to the Editor of the *Star* :

SIR,

The first question in to-night's Quiz is " In which Shakespearean play does the phrase 'What the dickens' occur ? " And the answer given is *She Stoops to Conquer*.

I have always felt that what Juvenal wrote was " *Quiz custodiet ipsos custodes ?* " Or should I attribute this to Horace ?

Your unsleeping

JAMES AGATE

*June 16 Sunday.* Dilys is incorrigible. " The visual detail, both of setting and of behaviour, is memorable: a lamp swinging on its flex as the boy stumbles through the dead girl's room. . . ." What I want to know is what a tobacconist's assistant is doing with a flat as big as my own, with innumerable divans, couches, armchairs, and electric lights ? And whether in Sweden young women die of drink before they reach the age of twenty ? But there are lots of things in *Frenzy*, at the Academy, in which I believe. I believe in the schoolmaster who cares nothing at all for women, but wants to paste the hides off the little beasts in front of him. And I entirely believe in the sadistic usher who distributes his favours indifferently while humming to himself *à la Floradora* :

Yes, I must thrash some one really,  
And it might as well be you.

*June 19 Wednesday.* Here is a bit of my broadcast debate on the Value of Dramatic Criticism.

A YOUNG MAN. It would be very interesting, Mr Agate, if you would tell us your opinion of the value of dramatic criticism.

AGATE. Young man, are you sure that you're not confusing 'value' with 'function' ? For half a crown I can buy a pair of braces. I suggest that braces, considered functionally, are worth

more than half a crown. Do you mind if we talk about the function of criticism? It might make what we're discussing clearer.

Y. M. All right. Let's put it that way. What is your view of the function of dramatic criticism?

AGATE. Dramatic criticism has three functions. The first is to let the world know what the previous night's new play has been about. There's no reason why a report of this kind should not be written by the same man who describes how in the afternoon he saw a man knocked down in Oxford Street trying to stop a runaway horse. The second function is to tell the public whether the new play is good, bad, or indifferent. This means that the critic must know his job. That is if you hold with my dictionary, which defines criticism as "the art of judging with knowledge and propriety of the beauties and faults of a work of art."

Y. M. But just how do critics know a good play from a bad?

AGATE. A play is good when the playgoer wants to know what some character—let us call him A—is going to do next, what B will say to C, and what is C's come-back.

Y. M. But, surely, even a cheap melodrama can have this effect on a popular audience?

AGATE. Then that cheap melodrama is a good play for that audience.

Y. M. This brings me to my next point. How would you tell a good play from a great play?

AGATE. That fine critic William Archer settled this years ago. In the case of a good play the spectator leaves the theatre in very much the state of mind in which he entered it. In the case of a great play he goes home feeling that he has undergone an experience. That he has been spiritually enriched by, say, a performance of *Everyman*, emotionally enriched by *King Lear*, intellectually enriched by *St Joan*.

Y. M. Yes, I follow that, but what is your third function of criticism?

AGATE. Reporting the theatre in terms of the art of writing. It is one hundred and fifteen years since Mrs Siddons died, and it still gives me exquisite pleasure to read that great passage in Hazlitt which runs: "She was Tragedy personified. She was the stateliest ornament of the public mind. She was not only the idol of the people, she not only hushed the tumultuous shouts of the pit in breathless expectation, and quenched the blaze of surrounding beauty in silent tears, but to the retired and lonely student, through long years of solitude, her face has shone as if an eye had appeared from heaven; her name has been as if a voice had opened the chambers of the human heart, or as if a trumpet had awakened the sleeping and the dead."

It is fifty years almost to the day since I read Shaw on Mary Anderson, an extremely beautiful woman who wasn't a very good actress. Shaw wrote: "The position our Mary wanted to begin with, in her teens, was that of Mrs Siddons. It is useless to gasp at

such presumption ; for she got what she demanded. She knew that it was childish to cry for the moon ; so she simply said, with quiet dignity, ' Be good enough to take that moon down from its nail and hand it to me.' Which was accordingly done. The world which once sent Mrs Siddons back to the provinces as a failure prostrated itself like a doormat to kiss the feet of Mary Anderson."

It is forty years since Walkley wrote about *The Doctor's Dilemma* : " A thoroughly ' Shavian ' play, this, stimulating and diverting, occasionally distressing, now and then bewildering. O philosopher ! O humorist ! you say with gratitude. And then you whisper, with a half-sigh, O Pierrot ! O Faun ! "

It is thirty-five years since I read C. E. Montague's estimate of Bernard Shaw : " Mr Shaw is one of the cyclonic kind of talents that charge through their time as an express train tears through country stations, and if your mind be only a piece of straw or an empty paper-bag, or is not pulled in any special direction by something else, it leaves all and follows the express until the express drops it a little farther on."

Y. M. Reading dramatic criticisms, I am sometimes inclined to think a great deal of it is destructive. Oughtn't criticism to be constructive ?

AGATE. Will you tell me how to write constructive criticism about a building after it has been erected ?

Y. M. Not of the finished play, perhaps. But shouldn't criticism of the production and the acting be constructive ?

AGATE. Neither producers nor actors take the slightest notice of critics. There is a famous scene in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The persons on the stage are Torvald Helmer, his wife Nora, and Dr Rank, their old friend, a dying man. Rank asks Torvald for a cigar, and Ibsen's stage direction is : " Nora hands match. Rank lights his cigar at it." Rank then makes his exit on the words " Thanks for the light " uttered to Nora, and obviously a reference to the solace and comfort which her friendship has brought him over the years. At a West End production some time ago it was the husband who gave the cigar and struck the light. And Rank, taking no notice of the wife, went out saying to the husband, " Thanks for the light," jauntily, as we should say to-day, " Ta, old man." I pointed out in my paper that this was all wrong. Was any notice taken ? No. A fortnight later I saw the performance again. No change had been made.

Y. M. But surely actors would benefit by constructive criticism ?

AGATE. Once a mumbler always a mumbler. That's all there is to be said about actors.

Y. M. Well, is criticism any use from the box-office point of view ?

AGATE. You mean : Does criticism help to drag the public in ? I could tell you an old story of how, many years ago, the then

dramatic critic of the B.B.C. so taunted and goaded the public by telling them that to give it Sherriff's *Journey's End* was like casting pearls before swine—so enraged the public that, to prove the critic wrong, on the day the booking opened Maurice Browne had enough applications for seats to fill the theatre for three weeks.

Y. M. Ah, but that's a long time ago.

AGATE. Well, then, I'll tell you a story of to-day. The takings for *No Room at the Inn*, produced at the Winter Garden Theatre some six weeks ago, were £35 on the Monday night and £105 on the Saturday night. Then Alan Dent got busy and wrote a magnificent eulogy of the play in his paper. On the Sunday I did my little bit. On the following Monday the takings were £104 as against £35, and on the Saturday £350 as against £105. I have a letter from the management saying that the result of those two articles was to treble the play's takings.

Y. M. Do you think a young man can be a good dramatic critic ?

AGATE. There may be the makings of a good critic in a young man. But you would not say that a beginner who had ascended only Snowdon was as good a judge of a mountain as a more experienced climber who had tackled the Matterhorn and Mount Everest.

Y. M. Would it be wrong to say that one man's opinion is as good as another's ?

AGATE. Let's talk sense. Suppose you found a bit of shiny stuff in the gutter and wanted to know whether it was diamond or glass. Would you take it to Hatton Garden or Covent Garden ?

Y. M. Is there anything else that you can say to young playgoers ?

AGATE. Yes, a great deal. But nothing that can be *usefully* said. In my day young people knew they didn't know ; now they are certain they know. I was turned thirty before I wrote my first dramatic criticism, having spent twenty years getting to know about plays and acting. The modern young man has no notion of educating himself for his job, or that he needs educating. He leaves Oxford by the morning train, and goes straight from Paddington to get himself appointed dramatic critic to some highbrow weekly. And on the following Saturday he has a column telling me Irving was ham. Good night !

**June 20**      Yesterday was a busy day, even for me ! I tabulate :  
**Thursday.**

9.0 A.M. Ring up all my acquaintance begging the loan of a pair of evening socks. Nobody has a pair, or else is wearing them. Finally succeed through the good offices of a cinema organist.

11.0 A.M. Rough-out first draft of article on last night's play.

Noon. Sally forth to Broadcasting House to record to-night's

## EGO 9

*talk, a thing I insist on in case of asthma, hiccups or that unforeseeable migraine which virtually blinds me for twenty minutes, and always the wrong twenty.*

1.0 P.M. Lunch with Gwen Chenhalls.

2.0 P.M. Preside at the Annual Meeting of the Hackney Horse Society and hand over the Presidency to my old, greatly esteemed friend Horace Smith, the first horse-dealer to be elected President in the history of the Society.

8.30 P.M. Back at the flat. Read and review three books until

7.30 P.M. Put on aforesaid socks with gear to correspond and

8.0 P.M. Take a snack at the Ivy. Sardines, cold salmon, asparagus, pint of champagne, coffee, brandy. and cigar. Bill, with tip, £2 16s. 0d., or rather more than I get for the broadcast after allowing for tax and service cars, taxis being unprocurable in this wet weather.

9.15 P.M. Broadcast.

10.0 P.M. Pick up my deplorable doctor and take him to the National Horse Show Ball at the Dorchester, where we make merry till

2.0 A.M. Bed.

So much for yesterday. My mail this] morning contains this letter from a lady :

You state in your column this morning that you have always understood that angels were masculine !! Emanuel Swedenborg, who claimed to be acquainted with them, stated that an angel was a married couple, and that when talking to them you could see both, but that at a slight distance you only saw one. And the same thing applies to the black kind, which is quite understandable, don't you think ! To be always tied to some one you hate would be a quite sufficient hell !

Also this from Scott Goddard :

21 *Vanbrugh Fields*  
*Blackheath, S.E.8*

DEAR AGATE,

It was a joy to have your letter ; the first ever, I think.

Before that night at the R. A. H. I'd been to one or two feasts when the old gasworks had been crowded with people who had come to hear or see a performer (which I suppose is what you want me to do when old Tossy and his La Scala Boys come to C. G.). Here, I said, is superb music, Handel at his most magical ; and the hall is a quarter filled. So much for musical taste.

What the hell has that got to do with Bartók (that lovely fiddle concerto) ? Or do you suggest that the young people, having had their attention directed to Bartók and Tippett, smile down on Handel from some Olympian height of their own scaling ? For the

*life of me I can't see why the one desire (for B. or H.) must exclude the other for H. or B. As for Tippet's exploring mind . . . well, I guess the phrase is a silly one ; but when I'm moved watching a man's mind earnestly working at something huge, that is the sort of thing my pen does. Your Second Young Person has got hold of the cat by the wrong end.*

Yours ever,  
SCOTT GODDARD

To which I reply :

Of course *you* don't see why one can't like both Bartók and Handel. But the young people who form the bulk of concert-goers haven't your mind. If you will go on dinning into their budding intelligences that the thing to like is music without tune they will naturally, if illogically, draw the conclusion that music with tune is not the thing to like. If I were to laud and over-laud, and go on lauding and over-lauding, plays in which the characters take off hats they are not wearing, read invisible newspapers, and drink cups of tea which aren't there, I should expect our young playgoers to stav away from *The School for Scandal* on the ground that Lady Teazle hides behind a real screen. Now put that in your imaginary pipe and smoke it.

*June 21* A young man sends me, anonymously, part of a letter he  
*Friday.* has written to a friend in America :

It is quite some time since I have recommended any books to you, so prepare yourself for a broadside : subject, the *Egos* of James Agate. His essays are chiefly noted for having *less* to do with their ostensible themes and *more* with almost every other subject in the galaxy, from horses to Hamlet, than those of any of his literary compeers—presuming it admissible that he has any ! Personally, I find they provide as stimulating a mental exercise, following the (at times almost untraceable) linkage of ideas, as, say, chess, or a chapter of Susan Stebbing. His other identifying features are a pedantic flow of quotations—usually, to give the devil his due, apt—and a regard for Sarah Bernhardt as idolatrous as mine for Yehudi Menuhin—and *you* have ploughed through sufficient pages of my ravings to know what a standard *that* sets up. . . .

The *Egos*—I have read up to 7 so far—are yearly-issued instalments of his Diary ; consisting of letters to and from the agate tower, reviews, personalia . . . definitely the most amusing, gossipy, callous, exhibitionistic, sentimental, florid, arrogant, pathetic, boring, Rabelaisian, aggravating, *readable* books ever published ! It must be slightly, if only subconsciously, worrying to his friends to know that they are writing to a man who automatically assesses every letter first on its literary and secondly on its personal value . . . rather like marrying a film actor and never being quite sure whether he is regarding you as his wife

or the Flame of the Desert, episode six. . . . None of his correspondents ever seem to send him thoroughly dull letters on commonplace subjects like Junior's teething or the acquisition of some new goldfish for the pool in the back garden : even when they deal with ordinary subjects they are brilliantly witty and quotable—unless 'tis the touch of the Master transforms them ?

Physically he looks like a cross between a bailiff and a farmer ; granite-hard and strong ; short, bulky build, bald, tiny porcine eyes, wide thin lips, Churchillian aggressiveness, wears ridiculous small round black bowler hat. . . .

Anyway, J. A. is a National Institution as much as tea, Sunday, and the Albert Memorial, and, in spite of his capacity for often arousing an almost homicidal fury in my breast, I thank God that there exists still one blatant egotist, one interesting individual in the spreading grey gloom of professed altruism in this " Century of the Common Man." . . .

*June 22* " Still harping on my daughter." Meaning that when  
*Saturday.* I have got my teeth into a subject I never let go, though I may sometimes pretend to. Here is part of my *Express* article to-day. I am reviewing H. L. Hitchins's *Chaucer for Present-day Readers* :

I have long had in mind a plan for shortening the classics. Let me take as an example Boswell's *Johnson*, of which I am a fanatical admirer, but which contains a colossal amount of dead wood. Who, for example, cares tuppence that in 1741 Johnson wrote for *The Gentleman's Magazine* one article entitled " Debate on the Proposal of Parliament to Cromwell, to assume the Title of King, abridged, modified, and digested," and four other contributions equally appetising ? Anybody opening Boswell at this point might well be excused for being frightened off this masterpiece for ever.

The foregoing is merely a preamble to what I have to say about Mr Hitchins's ' outrage,' which will make purists plunge razors and carving-knives into their gizzards. I will be frank with you, reader. I have tried to be a Chaucerian and failed. I can just make out what is meant by " Your eyen two wol slee me sodenly." But I have not the vaguest notion of what is meant by " The faire body, lat hit nat appere." Yet I have always wanted to read Chaucer, and now comes Mr Hitchins, who enables me to do so. Why shouldn't I, who haven't the time to study fourteenth-century English, be grateful ? Mr Hitchins begins with a blunt, straightforward, honest Foreword entitled " Where Angels Fear to Tread ":

" If you are already a reader of Chaucer, put this book down ! It is not meant for you. If you are a student of Middle English, take it with the tongs and put it on the back of the fire out of harm's way ! It might give you a nasty pain."



I have no notion what is meant by "ferne halwes" or a "bis-motored gypon." Mr Hitchens has made Chaucer readable to the ordinary man by substituting the modern word when absolutely necessary, printing "distant shrines" for "ferne halwes," and re-spelling, as in the case of "sweete breath" for "swete breeth." For my part, I thank him. I am now able to read about the Prioress :

Full well she sung the servicé divine  
Intoned in her nose full semély,  
And French she spake full fair and gracefully  
After the school of Stratford-atté-Bow,  
For French of Paris was to her unknowe.

Mr Hitchens says that this conglomeration of Middle and Modern English will be horrid to the learned etymologist. I don't care. Let the learned etymologist Morris-dance himself silly !

*June 23* At last a critic who sees the point about my divagations.  
*Sunday.* The *Times Lit. Supp.* says of *Around Cinemas* :

When the cinema tickles or scratches Mr Agate's critical faculty he reacts readily enough to the challenge—indeed, Charlie Chaplin still awaits more comprehensive study than this critic gave him in 1921, but it would appear that of nine-tenths of the films that come up for notice week by week there is little or nothing to be said. Some weeks the proportion of dead matter is even higher. Mr Agate, on his devious way to dispose briskly and amusingly of the week's rubbish, has always something else to talk about. It may be as remote from Wardour Street as Prince's golf course, which the critic once holed in 75. "Everybody in his life plays one faultless round of golf," he begins fantastically ; but with "it has fallen to my lot to play two such rounds" he is on the hard and happy ground of fact. Moreover, he is in the saddle and away. In place of what might have been an unreadable analysis of a forgotten mediocrity a very entertaining essay remains. It is not, needless to say, about golf, but a discussion of whether the enjoyment of a thing and the enjoyment of its reproduction are separate and incompatible pleasures. It leads eventually into the cinema.

I think this is intelligent as well as mighty handsome.

*June 24* Went this morning to a wee picture theatre in Dean Street  
*Monday.* to see the first of a series of films by which Marylebone Film Productions propose to bring Shakespeare to the masses. I was horrified, confounded, not by the attempt, but by the deed. First let me get rid of the popular misconception that there is no need to take Shakespeare to the masses because the masses lose

no opportunity of flocking to Shakespeare of their own accord. Harold Hobson wrote in yesterday's *Sunday Times* :

I am mildly puzzled by the notion that Shakespeare needs popularising with the general public. Few actors earned more from the general public than Irving did ; and he got most of his two millions out of Shakespeare. But that was a long time ago ? Very well then. Did Mr Richardson's Falstaff, did Mr Olivier's Richard III need popularising with the public, general or otherwise ? The only problem the Old Vic had when it was playing Shakespeare in its last two seasons at the New Theatre was that so many people came that many of them couldn't get into the house. But Mr Olivier and Mr Richardson gave superb performances ? Of course they did. Superb performances, not " popularising," are what Shakespeare needs. . . . Shakespeare is already beyond all dispute or cavil the world's most popular dramatist. Mr Rattigan and Mr Coward have golden fingers, but the money their admirable plays attract is a cabby's tip compared with what Shakespeare draws into the earth's box-offices. No, the proper way of tackling Shakespeare is not to begin his pieces half-way through, and then miss out half of what is left in the fear that audiences can't be expected to stand more than a bit of him. Play him magnificently and they will take it on the chin.

With all due respect to an old and valued friend and a brilliant writer, this is flat nonsense. The masses, always with the exception of the Old Vic faithfuls, do not flock to Shakespeare. What they flock to is Gielgud in something, and Richardson and Olivier in something else, and if it's Shakespeare it's just too bad. I quote from

It is owing to Wolfit that for four weeks in succession, *en pleine guerre*, there have been four revivals of plays by Shakespeare played to full or nearly full houses. But this is no reason why the London playgoer should lay flattering unction to his soul in the matter of improved taste. D. W.'s manager telephoned me this morning to say that at each and every performance Czechs, Poles, Norwegians, Belgians, and French had accounted for 50 per cent. of the audience and sometimes 75 per cent. " The rest have been Jews ; had we relied on the Christians we should have played to empty benches."

What happened, pray, when Wolfit announced his *Lear* at the Scala ? The theatre was empty until J. A. soundly berated what Shakespearian public there is. Hobson talks of the drawing power of Rattigan and Coward, as to which I have to say that their drawing power is real. Coward's *Blithe Spirit* ran for five years and suffered three or four changes of cast ; Heaven and John Parker alone know how long *Private Lives* ran. The original cast for the second of these

was headed by Gertrude Lawrence and Coward himself ; the piece is again running at the reopened little Fortune Theatre *without these artists*. Can Hobson really believe that the First and Second Parts of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* could run for five years with actors of diminishing fame ? As we used to say in Lancashire, " Have a bit of common ! "

But to return to this morning's picture. I was horrified to see that Othello's colour was glossed over and that there was no suggestion that Desdemona (a) married a blackamoor or (b) married against her father's will. Horrified to find that the play started with one of Iago's most difficult soliloquies, full of metaphysical straining. Horrified to see nothing of Cassio and Roderigo. Horrified when the business of the handkerchief was cut to an unintelligible two-thirds. Horrified that the audience was not told that the tragedy of Othello is that of a noble and simple soul undone by a subtle, scheming rascal. Horrified when they drowned Othello's closing speeches with the last movement of Tschaikowsky's Sixth Symphony. Horrified when Iago, instead of having the lean, sinister look which the *optique du théâtre* demands, was presented by an actor chubby of face, Falstaffianly stomached, and ready, one thought, at any moment to burst into an aria *à la Caruso*. Horrified when in enormous letters the screen announced " IAGGO," followed by the actor's name.

There was some talk of getting me to do the short version of *Macbeth*, and I confess that nothing would please me better. But I should have to be given a free hand. I hold that two things are essential in anybody who is going to film Shakespeare for the masses—reasonable understanding of Shakespeare and a thorough understanding of the masses. What is the little chit whom I overheard in the bus saying to her friend, " You wasn't taking us to the pictures Setterday, was you, 'Orace ? "—what is Camden Town going to make of :

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand ? No ; this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.

Wherefore I should insist upon making the plot as plain as if it was something enacted by Alan Ladd and Veronica Lake. I should make it clear, probably by a Reciter in the Obey manner, that *Macbeth* is a tragedy of retribution. Further, that the murder was not suggested by Lady Macbeth, but originated in Macbeth's mind

("What beast was't then That made you break this enterprise to me?") long before he encountered the Witches. Having established beyond any manner of doubt what was the core of the play—I should show the Witches as spirits abetting evil rather than instigating it—I should then trust to the poetry to get by, though I have almost no hope that it would. As the inventor of the law called the Non-increasability of Nothing I must believe in the Non-educability of the Masses, either by Shakespeare, Beethoven, or anybody else. But I am a firm believer in the Lost Cause, and as such can only hope my chit in the bus will be able to conceive that somebody can incarnadine something beyond her multitudinous toe and fingernails.

*June 26* Luncheon party at the Ivy to celebrate my fifteen years  
*Wednesday.* on the *Daily Express*. Guests: E. J. Robertson, manager; Arthur Christiansen, editor; Percy Cudlipp, editor of the *Daily Herald*; Tahu Hole, B.B.C.; and Bertie van Thal. The Ivy in great form, with a magnum of Pommery 1919 and other vinous kickshaws.

Kay Hammond told me this. Her younger son, Timothy, aged eight, had been to see his brother, John, aged eleven, play in his first cricket match. "He didn't bat, because it was six o'clock. But he bowled two overs and took ten wickets for no runs."

The Gentle Art again. Letter to the *News Chronicle* Gossip Writer:

*Queen Alexandras Mansionses*  
*Grapes Streets*

DEAR ELIZABETH FRANKSES,

Who is this Georges Sands you tell us about this morning in your Shows Newses? Am looking forward to *Summers at Nohants*.

Ever,

JAMES AGATES

*June 27* Should *Dombey and Son* be filmed? I think I would  
*Thursday.* rather ask, Can Dickens be filmed? The point is what you mean by Dickens. I suppose if anybody were to ask me how well I knew *Pickwick* I should answer, "By heart." Yet I haven't the vaguest notion, and I should have to turn up the book to see, whether Mr Pickwick went to Bath before the trial or after. It is the people he met at the trial and the people Sam Weller met at Bath who are the everlasting miracle and joy. When anybody

mentions this masterpiece to me I immediately think of the Pot-boy, the Muffin Youth, the Baked-potato Man, the large-headed Young Man in a black wig who brought with him to Bob Sawyer's party a Scorbutic Youth in a long stock. The Gentleman at the same party who wore a shirt emblazoned with pink anchors. The Pale Youth of the plated watchguard. The Prim Man in the cloth boots who had forgotten his anecdote, but hoped he should manage to recollect it in the course of half an hour or so. It is the same thing with *Our Mutual Friend*. I care nothing at all for the Riderhood-Rokesmith side of the business. On the other hand I am fascinated by the young gentleman with the lumpy forehead. I quote for the sheer pleasure of setting down the words :

A youngish, sallowish gentleman in spectacles, with a lumpy forehead, seated in a supplementary chair, at a corner of the table, here caused a profound sensation by saying, in a raised voice, "ESKER," and then stopping dead.

"Mais oui," said the foreign gentleman, turning towards him. "Est-ce que ? Quoi donc ?"

But the gentleman with the lumpy forehead, having for the time delivered himself of all that he found behind his lumps, spake for the time no more.

Is that all we hear of him ? No. There is one more sentence :

But the lumpy gentleman, unwilling to give it up, again madly said, "ESKER," and again spake no more.

It is this young gentleman and not who found whose corpse in what bend of what river that, for me, is the real Dickens.

Now consider the film or, for that matter, the stage. Neither medium is going to make anything of pale youths with plated watchguards or sallowish young gentlemen with lumpy foreheads. Both screen and stage want plot, and Dickens's plots are, to-day, a sheer downright nuisance. Some ten years ago I saw at the Palace Theatre the film which Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had made of *David Copperfield*. This film ran for more than two hours, and still could not find time for the Michaelangellesque waiter, the gentleman who bred Suffolk Punches wholesale, the voiceless Mr Creakle, the lonely Mr Mell who, even before Browning recommended it, blew out his brains upon the flute. There was nothing of the volatile Miss Mowcher, or Mrs Crupp of the nankeen bosom, or even of Hamlet's Aunt. But these were only minor omissions. In the major matter we saw nothing of Mr Spenlow, Mrs Steerforth, Rosa Dartle, Julia Mills, Traddles, the elder Miss Larkins, or the butcher boy whom David defeated. What

did the film find to put in their place ? A fine view of the shipwreck ! A great deal, too, about David. In fact, far too much, because David is not a character at all, whereas Master Freddie Bartholomew was at that period a great Hollywood draw.

And then there was the great mistake of casting W. C. Fields as Micawber. Here is Dickens's description of this great character at his first appearance : " ' This,' said the stranger, with a certain condescending roll in his voice, and a certain indescribable air of doing something genteel, which impressed me very much, ' is Master Copperfield. I hope I see you well, sir ? ' " What is wrong with Fields is that he is about as genteel as a pork pie. It is impossible for him to condescend, because it is not conceivable that this jovial creature would hold anybody to be beneath him in the social scale. It is impossible that this Micawber would use a word like ' peregrination ' or know the meaning of ' arcana.' These high-sounding phrases should roll off the tongue, whereas Fields gave one the impression of having mastered them with difficulty. Indeed, the only really first-class impersonations were those of Edna May Oliver as Betsey Trotwood, who had that exact wooden appearance, as of an Aunt Sally, with which Phiz has immortalised her. The other first-rate performance was Lennox Pawle's Mr Dick. All the rest were approximations. The film was rattling good entertainment, but it just wasn't Dickens's novel.

What do I want to see in a film of *Great Expectations*, upon which novel some British company is now wreaking its best or worst ? First of all Trabb's boy strutting along the pavement attended by his delighted friends, " pulling up his shirt-collar, twining his side-hair, sticking an arm akimbo, smirking extravagantly by, while wriggling his elbows and body, and drawling to his attendants, ' Don't know yah, don't know yah, 'pon my soul don't know yah ! ' " Next a shot of the outside of Wemmick's castle with the real flagstaff, the real drawbridge and portcullis, and that piece of ordnance which was a Stinger mounted in a lattice-work fortress and protected from the weather by an ingenious tarpaulin contrivance of the nature of an umbrella. I want to see the owner of the castle, the Aged One, and Wemmick's fiancée, that Miss Skiffins of wooden appearance who washed up the tea-things " in a trifling ladylike amateur manner that compromised none of us " ! And at least five minutes of Mr Wopsle's Hamlet, preferably the scene in the churchyard " which had the appearance of a primeval forest, with a kind of small ecclesiastical wash-house on one side and a turnpike gate on the other." And two

minutes of Mr Waldengarver saying, "You must have observed, gentlemen, an ignorant and a blatant ass, with a rasping throat and a countenance expressive of low malignity, who went through—I will not say sustained—the rôle (if I may use a French expression) of Claudius King of Denmark!" And what do I think we shall get? A terrific amount of plot. Plot in which Compeyson, Magwitch, and Miss Havisham play enormous parts. Then I am afraid we shall see a great deal too much of Pip. Now Pip, like David, doesn't exist. Or if he does it is by virtue of Herbert Pocket. Pip really wants a death scene to bring him to life, when, like Stevenson with Dumas's Raoul de Bragelonne, we could "congratulate him, who has so long pretended to be alive, on being at last suffered to pretend to be dead." Once again I am inclined to think that the essential Dickens must escape the camera even though the hand of genius turns it.

The people I am most attached to in *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, and *Dombey and Son* are Traddles, Herbert Pocket, and Mr Toots. I have, for this trio, the same affection that, as a boy, I entertained for Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Gossiping about Dumas's novel, Stevenson said:

Madame enchants me; I can forgive that royal minx her most serious offences; I can thrill and soften with the King on that memorable occasion when he goes to upbraid and remains to flirt; and when it comes to the "*Allons, aimez-moi donc*," it is my heart that melts in the bosom of de Guiche.

It is my heart that melts when Toots, told by Susan Nipper that Florence will never love him, has his immortal, "Thank'ee! It's of no consequence. Good night. It's of no consequence, thank'ee!" To think that George Gissing in his *Critical Study* makes no mention of Mr Toots! Let me correct myself; there is a mention:

You lay down, for instance, Thackeray's *Pendennis*, and soon after you happen to take up *Dombey and Son*. Comparisons arise. Whilst reading of Major Bagstock, you find your thoughts wandering to Major Pendennis; when occupied (rather disdainfully) with Mr Toots, you suddenly recall Foker. What can be the immediate outcome of such contrast? It seems impossible to deny to Thackeray a great superiority in the drawing of character; his aristocratic Major and his wealthy young jackass are so much more 'real,' that is to say, so much more familiar, than the promoted young vulgarian Bagstock and the enriched whipper-snapper Toots.

Whereupon I have great difficulty in not hurling the book across the room. Enriched whipper-snapper, forsooth! Compare Chesterton:

Toots is what none of Dickens's dignified characters are, in the most serious sense, a true lover. He is the twin of Romeo. He has passion, humility, self-knowledge, a mind lifted into all magnanimous thoughts, everything that goes with the best kind of romantic love.

And again :

Dickens makes us not only like, but love, not only love but reverence this little dunce and cad. . . . We know Toots is not clever ; but we are not inclined to quarrel with Toots because he is not clever. We are more likely to quarrel with cleverness because it is not Toots. All the examinations he could not pass, all the schools he could not enter, all the temporary tests of brain and culture which surrounded him shall pass, and Toots shall remain like a mountain.

I turn again to Gissing, and I read about Mrs Skewton :

Her paralytic seizure, her death in life, are fine and grisly realism ; but we do not accept Mrs Skewton as a typical figure. Too obvious is the comparison with Thackeray's work ; Dickens is here at a grave disadvantage, and would have done better not to touch that ground at all.

And here the book is definitely flung away. But then I don't think that Gissing had much sense of fun or really understood Dickens.

Of fair women in drama and the novel Stevenson wrote :

Who doubts the loveliness of Rosalind ? Arden itself was not more lovely. Who ever questioned the perennial charm of Rose Jocelyn, Lucy Desborough, or Clara Middleton ? fair women with fair names, the daughters of George Meredith. Elizabeth Bennet has but to speak, and I am at her knees.

Dickens's Cleopatra has only to attempt her sketchiest *œillade* and I am all pulse.

I assure you, Mr Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I have ever sighed for has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows—and china.

When I think of *Dombey and Son* I am immediately surrounded by Mr Toots and Cleopatra. Like those figures on that Grecian Urn, For ever will he love, and she be fair ! Pray, how can the screen hope to present these ? Instead we shall be given some tearing melodrama in the first half of which Little Paul takes an unconscionable time



a-dying, and in the second an express train whirls through the air, lit only by Carker's gleaming teeth.

*June 28* Lunch with George Harrap, and to show my gratitude for the really lovely production of *A Shorter Ego* made for me to my godson, James William Harrap, a one-third share in My Pretty. Say one hoof, one ear, and a bit of tail.

In a letter from George Lyttelton :

Were you at the Test Match ? I saw the last two, but it wasn't really nearly so easy a victory as it looked. The batsmen fielded superbly, their bowlers kept the batsmen playing for a long time, and their batting was full of skill and spirit. P. F. O. told me that Charles Fry said they are the finest natural cricketers he has ever seen and that in ten years they will be beating the Australians, and anyone else. I don't see the English bowlers troubling Hassett and Co. much. Bedser the Press with or without a poplexy. I shouldn't go higher than Kermode. There has never been a Test Match bowler with a clumsy action like theirs.

And *The Times* has this :

## PROPAGANDA AND THE NATIVE

SIR,

In the recent debate on the future of the B.B.C. your Lordship was saying :

" He would like to know what control the Postmaster General exercised over the foreign broadcasts from this country. I don't think the knock-about the Mufti was a digression, but these foreign broadcasts are very important. Had the B.B.C. taken the opportunity to see to it that the music was being poured, day and night, into the ears of Arab, Jew, and Levantines, and Syrians what a wicked old scoundrel would he have been ? "

Is it permissible to suggest that the ear-pourers should have had sufficient knowledge of native psychology to know what the natives are going to make of the stuff poured into them ? A friend of mine who is a trader on the Congo told me that British propaganda about Hitler's crimes staining the soul of Germany and the conscience of civilisation did the British cause infinite harm. The African native, said my friend, or, rather, the native of the West Indies, knows nothing about souls, conscience, or when his boys heard about Rotterdam and the mass murder in the gas chambers they did whatever is the native equivalent of rubbing their hands. The African knows force and weakness, and their view of Hitler as put out by our broadcasts was

must be the very devil of a fellow and a man they would go through fire for.

Yours faithfully,  
JAMES AGATE

June 29 Letter from Lord Beaverbrook :  
Saturday.

Cherkley  
Leatherhead  
Surrey

DEAR AGATE,

I send you my warmest congratulations on completing 15 years as Book Critic of the *Daily Express*.

It is a long record of fine service to the public and the newspaper.

And, as one of your steadiest readers, I send you my personal thanks for much pleasant reading.

Yours sincerely,  
BEAVERBROOK

To which I reply :

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR LORD BEAVERBROOK,

Many thanks for your kind letter. Do you remember Hilary Jesson in Pinero's *His House in Order* ?

"Encouragement, sir. Don't we all need encouragement, in every department of life ? Did you never hunger for a word of praise, Sir Daniel—aye, and receive it—during your period of stress and struggle ; and, in memory of that time, have you never thrown a bone into the kennel of that promising young dog there ? "

I am an old dog now, but none the less one who is very grateful for the bone you have so charmingly thrown to him this morning.

Thank you again.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

Also letter from Bertie van Thal questioning the last sentence in my letter to *The Times*. My reply :

No, dear ass, the other way is pedantic. No African native says, "Hitler's the man for whom I would go through fire !" What he says is "Wolla, wolla, wolla ! Hitler's the man I would go through fire for !" Do you imagine, sweet idiot, that I didn't weigh this up ?

Your impeccable,  
JAMES

**June 80 Sunday.** Ivor Brown ends his article on Rodney Ackland's adaptation of *Crime and Punishment*, at the New Theatre: "My interest (and respect) were continuous: but I never could escape from the awareness of my address, which was neither St Petersburg nor Parnassus, but the New Theatre, London." And I compare something I wrote twenty-two years ago about the Yiddish Art Theatre's production of *The Seven Who Were Hanged*: "If on leaving the Scala you had asked me what the piece had been like I could not have told you. If you had desired to know how I had fared in Russia I should have made shift to reply." I remember the remarkable figure of Isidor Cachier's Cabinet Minister. He is told by the Chief of Police that the authorities have discovered a plot to assassinate him next morning, but that his Excellency is in no danger as the conspirators are known and will be arrested in front of his house before the bomb is thrown. In spite of this assurance the Minister is so terrified at the idea of death that he dies of apoplexy. The second act gives the trial and sentencing of the five anarchists, to whom are joined a half-witted, subnormal vagrant and a brigand. The third act shows them all in prison; the fourth depicts their behaviour on the train that is to take them to the place of execution. The last act gives the procession on the way to the scaffold. Never have I forgotten the impression Cachier made on me. At the beginning a figure of farce as the elder Guitry might conceive farce, scenting his waistcoat, hands, and the tufts of hair surrounding his little pig-like ears, then changing to a figment of Grand Guignol with his horrible, stertorous death-agonies.

Ivor complains that Ustinov's Chief of Police lacks "the knock-down veracity" that Charles Laughton put into a similar part in J. B. Fagan's *The Greater Love* of nineteen years ago. As Jock in the *News Chronicle* makes the same comparison I am all agog to see what I wrote. I find:

Mr Laughton has played, to my knowledge, three parts in London—Ephikhodof, the clerk in *The Cherry Orchard*, the humorous wastrel in *Liliom*, and now this Russian Governor. To my knowledge, I say, but only because of the programme. In each part this actor has been at once superb and unrecognisable, achieving his differences not by inessential wiggery, but by seizing the essence of the character and making his body conform. This is character-acting as the great and not the little masters of that art have always understood it. To watch this sleek, polite, overfed tyrant wake from eupeptic slumber to smile a possible assassin to Siberia—this was to be told something authentic about the

Tsarist terror. Pleasures too refined and cruelties too barbarous were in the flutter of those sleepy eyelids, the indolent, caressing voice, the slow-moving, velvet hands. Now I am not going to make a song about three performances and proclaim Mr Laughton a great actor on the strength of them. But I will say this, that whenever he has been on the stage my eyes have never left him, and that on Wednesday night his abstractions held more of Russia than all the talkers put together.

About Sybil Thorndike, who played the heroine, I find this :

Nadeshda, when once she got going, was obviously a part to tear a cat in, and Miss Thorndike split and rent whole tribes of *felidæ*, while managing to retain every appearance of rationality. But the swooning and the transports were not altogether convincing, and the part offered little scope for the actress's finer brand of spiritual magnetism. The exotic languors and molten grace, the purring and scratching of a Bernhardt are essential to these man-eating leopardesses who would induce Russian Chiefs of Police to change their spots. Miss Thorndike's art invites to serener raptures, and where orchidacity is the fashion homespun leaves one unsatisfied. The actress was magnificently reasonable throughout, but one would have preferred her to be less reasonable and more magnificent. What is the use of melodramatic Russia if you cannot sweep through it in tea-gowns of Babylonish allure ? Miss Thorndike wore a dress of modest drab and behaved like a woman of sense. But, again, is sense the wear for that femininity which braves a barrack-room at midnight ? Are not sables the only cloak for virtue in such case ? It is true that Miss Thorndike wore furs. But then again they were reasonable furs, whereas Sarah's, when she played *Fédora*, trailed behind her to the length of several versts. In this Russia of Sardou which Mr Fagan has tried to make his, governesses must look like princesses, and princesses like prima donnas. Miss Thorndike will forgive me if I say that she wasn't nearly scrumptious enough, that she was too much like life, that I prefer her Jane Clegg to her Ivanovna Cleggorovitch.

All that's a long time ago and, I am afraid, of no interest to to-day's young people, who seem to think that the art of acting began with Margaret Lockwood.

Took Gwen Chenhalls to lunch at the Savoy, after which we dropped in to Harold Holt's last of the season's Albert Hall concerts. Just in time for Ravel's *La Valse*, played by the L.S.O. conducted by Antal Dorati, who seems to have modelled his style half on Houdini and half on Joe Louis. Ravishing performance, during which I thought of Leo, who adored this piece. Gwen, whose wedding

anniversary falls to-day, thought of Alfred ; it seems that he insisted on having an organ version of this played in place of the anthem, much to the astonishment of the congregation at the Marylebone Parish Church.

*July 1 Monday.* The B.B.C. ran true to form last night. Voice from America : " The Bomb will now be dropped half an hour earlier, at 9 P.M.—sorry, I mean 9 A.M., British double—sorry, I mean British Summer Time." Then a quite good lecture by a professor. As the broadcast sounded like Donald Duck in a railway-siding during shunting operations and a thunderstorm it was suspended and replaced by records of Sousa. *Sousa!* " The operation is to decide whether Man is to become obsolete " had been the Professor's last words. And after it was all over ? Two dance-bands !

Letter from Stanley Rubinstein, to whom I had given a *de luxe* copy of *A Shorter Ego* inscribed, Vol. 1 : " To Stanley Rubinstein, who has so often dragged me out of the quagmire . . ." Vol. 2 : " . . . to plunge me into the morass ! "

24 St Mary Abbot's Court  
Kensington, W.14

MY DEAR JIMMIE,

I did not have an opportunity during the week of writing to thank you for the magnificent present which arrived so opportunely for the party we gave to celebrate the thirty-first anniversary of our wedding, Joan's success in becoming a solicitor, and Anthony's release from the Royal Marines. The books have been adopted as family heirlooms, and the inscriptions produced the quite inevitable rejoinder—" More ass you for permitting me to do so ! "

Re-reading, I am reminded of a *Conte Scabreux* which I intended sending you long ago.

Do you remember Moore's *Fudges in England* ? And Miss Betty Fudge—piety in petticoats—torn between Heaven and earth and mixing the carnal with the spiritual indiscriminately—in verse ? Her concern for the soul of a man—her hopes to save—and how the idea of marriage to him occurs to her :

Not *this* world's wedlock—gross, gallant,  
But pure,—as when Amram married his aunt.

And this was published in 1885 !

Gratefully,  
STANLEY RUBINSTEIN

Also this from Tahu Hole :

*Oriental Club*

DEAR MR AGATE,

The way in which, at your delightful luncheon party on Wednesday, you appeared, with such a wealth of exhilarating theatrical gesture, so soon after popping the cork of a magnum, rapidly to tire of trying to open a mere *bottle* of champagne, struck me—and, obviously, the other guests—so happily as a piece of refreshing impishness, that it was easy to imagine that Miss Kay Hammond and Mr John Clements, together with the rest of the amused company watching from neighbouring tables, were, with their smiles, saluting an established master who had nothing to lose by the indulgence of a charming whim. I hope you will never deny yourself indulgences of the kind ; and it must be the wish of all your friends that you will see to it that any suggestion for economy of effect is treated with the acrid contempt of a Cesare Borgia, which, assuredly, it would merit.

Yours-sincerely,  
TAHU HOLE

In the meantime I am in terrible trouble with *Daily Express* readers for saying that I don't believe a witty thing is ever said north of Willesden. Scores of letters pointing out that Middlesbrough is the backbone of the country. To which my answer is, Yes, but I don't want my clothes made there. I have no doubt that Brighouse has claims to vertebral consideration. But I don't see Gwen Chenhalls buying a hat there. If I dared I would treat *Express* readers to Balzac on the subject.

Quelque grande, quelque belle, quelque forte que soit à son début une jeune fille née dans un département quelconque, si, comme Dinah Piédefer, elle se marie en province et si elle y reste, elle devient bientôt femme de province. Malgré ses projets arrêtés, les lieux communs, la médiocrité des idées, l'insouciance de la toilette, l'horticulture des vulgarités, envahissent l'être sublime caché dans cette âme neuve, et tout est dit, la belle plante dépérit. Comment en serait-il autrement ? Dès leur bas âge, les jeunes filles de province ne voient que des gens de province autour d'elles, elles n'inventent pas mieux, elles n'ont à choisir qu'entre des médiocrités ; les pères de province ne marient leurs filles qu'à des garçons de province ; personne n'a l'idée de croiser les races, l'esprit s'abâtardit nécessairement ; aussi, dans beaucoup de villes, l'intelligence est-elle devenue aussi rare que le sang y est laid. L'homme s'y rabougrit sous les deux espèces, car la sinistre idée des convenances de fortune y domine toutes les conventions matrimoniales. Les gens de talent, les artistes, les hommes supérieurs, tout coq à plumes

éclatantes s'envole à Paris. Inférieure comme femme, une femme de province est encore inférieure par son mari. Vivez donc heureuse avec ces deux pensées écrasantes ! Mais l'infériorité conjugale et l'infériorité radicale de la femme de province sont aggravées d'une troisième et terrible infériorité qui contribue à rendre cette figure sèche et sombre, à la rétrécir, à l'amoindrir, à la grimer fatalement. L'une des plus agréables flatteries que les femmes s'adressent à elles-mêmes n'est-elle pas la certitude d'être pour quelque chose dans la vie d'un homme supérieur choisi par elles en connaissance de cause, comme pour prendre leur revanche du mariage où leurs goûts ont été peu consultés ? Or, en province, s'il n'y a point de supériorité chez les maris, il en existe encore moins chez les célibataires. Aussi, quand la femme de province commet sa petite faure, s'est-elle toujours éprise d'un prétendu bel homme ou d'un dandy indigène, d'un garçon qui porte des gants, qui passe pour savoir monter à cheval ; mais, au fond de son cœur, elle sait que ses vœux poursuivent un lieu commun plus ou moins bien vêtu.

I just can't see myself telling *Express* readers that the most gifted young woman who marries in the provinces and remains in the provinces becomes provincial. That to this inferiority is added the inferiority of her husband, since every cock with feathers to its tail has flown to London. Last indignity of all. That when she makes her little slip it is not with a man of talent, since there are none, but with somebody who wears gloves or thinks he looks well on a horse. No, I can't think Lord Beaverbrook would give me a pat on the back for this. So break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

*July 2*      The Secretary of the Hallé Concerts Society having asked  
*Tuesday.*    me for an article for their new magazine, I have sent  
                 them the following :

### ALBUM LEAF

The Pleasures of Listening. Yes, but why seek the opinion of a dramatic critic almost entirely preoccupied with the Pains of Looking, a book critic stifled with the Plagues of Skipping, a film critic asphyxiated with the Penalties of Technigazing ? Presumably because I am an old Hallé fan. I shudder at the last word, and could almost break off to write an essay on the Decline of Taste.

The joy of great music ? Too big a subject for an essaylet. Let me take refuge in reminiscence. I attended my first Hallé concert at the age of seven. Yes, the year was 1884. I was taken by my nurse to the Reform Club in King Street, and deposited in

the hall to wait until my father had finished his dinner. Then in a yellow four-wheeled cab with red plush seats to the Free Trade Hall and a seat in the gallery with a view of Hallé's left profile and, when he was playing the piano, a full view of his back, the idea being that I, as a commencing student of that instrument, might observe the fingering. I thought Hallé a nice old gentleman, but a tame player, with less than half my mother's fire. It is only fair to say that she had studied under Madame Heinefetter, a pupil of Chopin.

Later on came the Christmas performance of Handel's *Messiah*. Edward Lloyd looked to me as though he wore a *toupet*—but nobody else has ever sung "Comfort Ye" so well. Santley's voice was gone even then (I don't believe there was ever a time when it wasn't gone!). He sounded like a lion in *delirium tremens*, and in "Why do the nations" his head and hands shook with something which was half dæmonism and half palsy. Albani was always tremendous in ruby velvet, which made me feel sorry for Ada Crossley, who, as became her inferior station as a contralto, generally moped in black. I adored Norman-Neruda long before she became Lady Hallé. I thought her ugly but supremely elegant, and still can see that thin gold bangle slide up and down her bowing arm.

*Enfin Richter vint.* And I remember how, at the first performance in Manchester of Tschaikowsky's Pathetic Symphony, Richter laid down his bâton in the second movement and let the orchestra conduct itself. Carreño in the Tschaikowsky Piano Concerto in B flat minor. There, if you like, was fire and force and a walloping pair of arms, and the proper atmosphere of a blacksmith's shop. Lots and lots of great pianists—Busoni, d'Albert, Rosenthal, Backhaus, Petri, Pachmann, whom I thought a charlatan, and one or two Englishmen I didn't think much of because (a) they were English and (b) I didn't think they could really play. Piano quartets, yes; but the Concerto in the grand style, no. I remember crying when on one occasion the pianist turned out to be Leonard Borwick.

The meandering Delius. Was ever anything less like a fair? Or less like Paris? And I remember my Daudet:

Maison Bénie! Que de fois  
je suis venu là, me reprendre  
à la Nature, me guérir  
de Paris et de ses fièvres.

Did Daudet in very sooth desire to be cured of Paris and its fevers? Did Delius ever have fevers of which to be cured? My first Symphonic Poem, Strauss's *Don Juan*. My first Elgar. And, of course, lots of Wagner, conducted in the heavy, beer-and-tobacco-stained, German and proper manner.

But those were the days of *tune*, when, as likely as not, the season would open with the *Euryanthe* Overture of Weber, always



provided it was not Cherubini's *Anacreon* or Nicolai's *Merry Wives*. And once at least during the season we should be given the *Oberon* and *Freischütz* Overtures, and some stout lady in yellow satin would sing "Ocean, thou mighty monster," and look as though she was prepared to swallow as well as apostrophise it. Or shriek a greeting to some Hall of Song, and later, after clapping on more tulle, send out an SOS in the shape of Senta's Ballad. But all this was the age before Bartók.

In those days the leader of the orchestra was Willy Hess. At the same desk sat Siegfried Jacoby, who taught the violin to two of my brothers, and was a great consumer of tea and buttered toast, and a mordant wit. I remember being called in to play the piano part in a *concertante* by somebody, and being in a state of terror the entire time and hardly reassured by his "Vell, ve finished together, und dat is something." Yes, mine is a musical family. It is not given to every young man to have got lost on Snowdon in company with the grandson of the great Manuel Garcia. Or to have met Carl Fuchs, the 'cellist, on the top of Helvellyn. Or even to have played the piano to Henry Wood two years before his first promenade concert.

But I must be getting back to Manchester and the Free Trade Hall. Of what did I think as my legs dangled and my cream socks fell over my black shoes, which fastened with a button and strap? Well, I used to weave romances about the people in the gallery opposite. And I conceived a violent hatred of the man on my other side, who never spoke to me throughout eight years and sat stiff as a poker, rather like a male Betsey Trotwood.

With my dislike of him I connect certain distastes which have remained with me all my life. Nearly all slow movements, *because they go on too long*. Beethoven, in my early view, was a great offender, particularly in the Seventh Symphony, where I still think he should have wound up the Allegretto three minutes earlier. Anything called a recitative, nearly all Bach, vast quantities of that dry pedant Brahms. All the piano pieces of Schumann, and most of all that loathsome thing called "Grillen." As against this I had my special favourites. There was Adolph Brodsky, who didn't seem to me to be very good as soloist, leader, or conductor, but whom I liked for his genial expression and tummy. Singers, too. Marie Brema; a lady who was always known as Miss Fillunger; that great bass singer George Henschel, whose "Spring" is one of the most beautiful songs ever written, a colossal Swede of the name of Lundquist.

With these goes the memory of the best musical criticism this country has ever seen:

"Mozart has done more to debauch the critical sense of musicians than any composer who ever lived; practically no one ever mentions his name except in words of absolutely indiscriminating eulogy. . . . But those who do not lose their heads over Mozart are constrained to point out that no organism can have

such qualities as his without having the correlative defects. If the stream of speech runs so easily and so unceasingly, it is bound at times to run a little thin ; and it is this thinness that wearies some people after a day or two spent in going not merely through the half-dozen masterpieces of Mozart but through a large quantity of his work of all kinds. One rather tires of seeing what is almost nothing at all said with such perfect grace and such formal impeccability . . . The Mozart fanatic rhapsodises about Mozart, but does not think enough about him."

That was written by the musical critic of the *Manchester Guardian* on the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Mozart. It comes first in my first newspaper-cutting book, and the date is January 27, 1906. Is anybody writing stuff as good as this to-day, in London, Sydney, Kamchatka, Colwyn Bay ? No. The *Manchester Guardian* and the Hallé Concerts are the last remaining glories of a city which, when I last visited it, seemed entirely given over to motor salesmen.

And here I must stop. All that I have been writing about happened many years ago. And I am still listening to music. As the great poet so nearly wrote :

The Child is Father of the Man ;  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural melody.

And no Bartókery, if you please !

*July 4*            Ivor Brown laid it down recently that a critic who finds  
*Thursday.*       himself allergic to any department of entertainment  
                      "ought to stay away from these, to him, foolish  
things." I agree, with the reservation that if he is allergic to too many things he should chuck his job and go in for something else. Fortunately I am not allergic to much. Modern British music, modern poetic drama, Shaw's plays, ballet, mime, musical comedy, Fred Astaire, skating films, and British film acting—this is very nearly the lot. Remains only Walt Disney. There is nothing on land or sea, nothing in the air or in the bowels of the earth, that bores me so abysmally as the later pictures of Walt Disney. Which goes for Donald Duck too. I would rather sit at the bottom of a coal-mine, in the dark, alone, and think of nothing, than go to see any of the successors to *Fantasia*. I would rather listen to Bloch's String Quartet played in a goods-yard, with shunting operations in full swing and all the Jews trying to get into or out of Palestine (I never remember which) wailing up against the walls—there is no noise known to me, including the road drill and the later compositions

of Béla Bartók, that I execrate so deeply as the squawking of that abominable fowl. Wherefore I have told the *Tatler* that I will not go near *Make Mine Music*.

July 5 Letter from Christopher Fry :  
Friday.

*Shipton-under-Wychwood*  
*Oxfordshire*

DEAR JAMES,

I haven't forgotten that I owe you a penny and all because that waiter of yours didn't look in the least like Valentino in *The Sheik*, or even as though he could fold a tent. He can have no sense of psycho-physico-fitness. Here's the penny.

I'm sorry not to have sent it before—I hope you haven't been needing it—but I have been trying to get hold of a script of my small-sized comedy which you said you would try to read ; and I've got hold of it, and this is it.

I enjoyed the Café Royal with you very much.

Ever sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER FRY

My answer :

No, my dear Christopher, I decline to let your *Phœnix* cheat me of a sigh or charm me to a tear. I get almost no pleasure from it, because it makes me work too hard. I know what Macbeth means when he says :

Light thickens, and the crow  
Makes wing to the rooky wood.

The sense goes with the sound. But I don't understand what your Dynamene intends when she says :

What a mad blacksmith creation is  
Who blows his furnaces until the stars fly upward  
And iron Time is hot and politicians glow  
And bulbs and roots sizzle into hyacinth  
And orchis, and the sand puts out the lion,  
Roaring yellow, and oceans bud with porpoises,  
Blenny, tunny and the almost unexisting  
Blindfish ; throats are cut, the masterpiece  
Looms out of labour ; nations and rebellions  
Are spat out to hang on the wind.

What does she mean by "the sand puts out the lion" ? That the sand is so yellow that the lion cannot be seen against it ? I fault this speech in three ways. It makes me think too hard ; the thoughts expressed are not feminine (the "blacksmith" metaphor

EGO 9

would not enter any woman's head) ; it has no music. Compare Emily Dickinson's verse about our last bed :

Be its mattress straight,  
Be its pillow round ;  
Let no sunrise' yellow noise  
Interrupt this ground.

How yellow is your lion now ? Can't you hear that this verse sings, and that your

You have the air of a natural-historian  
As though you were accustomed to handling birds' eggs,  
Or tadpoles, or putting labels on moths. You see ?  
The 'genius of dumb things, that they are nameless

just doesn't ? You get nearer with

But insects meet and part  
And put the woods about them, fill the dusk  
And freckle the light and go and come without  
A name among them, without the wish of a name  
And very pleasant too. Did I interrupt you ?

But then there's that dreadful last line :

And very pleasant too. Did I interrupt you ?

And you want me to slog out to some hole in some suburban corner to listen to

DYNAMENE

Stop, stop, I shall be dragged apart !  
Why should the fates do everything to keep me  
From dying honourably ? They must have got  
Tired of honour in Elysium. Chromis, it's terrible  
To be susceptible to two conflicting norths.  
I have the constitution of a whirlpool,  
Am I actually twirling, or is it just sensation ?

TEGEUS

You're still ; still as the darkness.

DYNAMENE

What appears  
Is so unlike what is. And what is madness  
To those who only observe, is often wisdom  
To those to whom it happens.

TEGEUS

Are we compelled  
To go into all this ?

The answer is that I am not, and won't.

Ever your well-wishing,

JAMES AGATH

July 6 Sent this letter to *The Times* :  
Saturday.

SIR,

Let us have a little less emotionalism and a little more logic. Dr Moody and Mr Horrabin must find means of proving that my friend's statement was untrue. [See entry for June 28.] That the British broadcasts did *not* make the natives of a certain specified part of Africa think Hitler a fine fellow.

Suppose some European monster who cut off his victims' heads, pickled them, and put them in a show-case. Would a broadcast of the monster's trial have the same effect on the head-hunters of Borneo and Assam that it would have on old ladies listening at, say, Buxton and Marlow? I can conceive that such a broadcast might be followed by an increase in our show-case trade. (Export, Malay Archipelago, North India.)

Chinese music affects the ear according as the ear is Chinese or European. May not a principle, a precept, a piece of propaganda change its colour according to the latitude and longitude of the receiving set?

Sentimentalists should keep in mind Hamlet's "There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Are Dr Moody and Mr Horrabin quite certain that Upper Thames and Upper Congo think alike, or interpret thought in the same way? The point is not how nice it would be if they did, but whether they do.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES AGATE

July 7 *Toujours* the Gentle Art :  
Sunday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR BEVERLEY BAXTER,

A little learning, etc. "Who will forgive God?" does not occur in *For Services Rendered*. It is a line out of the second act of Somerset Maugham's *The Unknown*, produced at the Aldwych on August 9, 1920. It was spoken by Haidée Wright in the character of Mrs Littlewood. H. W. did not play in *For Services Rendered*.

By the way, there was no such person as "A. B. Walkeley."

Ever your,

JAMES

P.S. And what in hell's name do you mean by "Perhaps they could not cope with unsmiling Maugham"? Can you be one of the people who pronounce 'Maugham' as though it were spelled 'Maughan'? Like the chorus-girls who pronounce 'pantomime'!

as though it were spelled 'pantomine'? If you aren't, then what becomes of your joke? In which cleft stick I leave you, my dear, muddle-headed friend.

P.P.S. And how can you call Shaw an *artist*? Intellectual giant, innovator, wit, superb craftsman, yes. Artist, NO. He is no more an artist than he is a poet. Don't you know your Montague—I am writing this with *Rosenkavalier* in full spate on my newly restored E. M. G. gramophone; you must come and hear it some time and I'll give you a first lesson in the rudiments of dramatic criticism, you chuckle-headed Big Ben-ite—who wrote "So when Mr Shaw makes his young poet talk 'softly and musically, but sadly and longingly' of a 'tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world, where the marble floors are washed by the rain and dried by the sun; where the south wind dusts the beautiful green and purple carpets,' we salute an honest effort, but also we feel that, as Holofernes said of Biron's verses, 'Here are only numbers ratified; but, for the elegance, facility, and golden cadence of poesy, *caret*'. . . When Mr Shaw, the rationalist, the determinist, the literalist, the man who thinks, as Tybalt fenced, 'by the book of arithmetic,' essays the description of golden dreams, the result is a chill or a bewilderment." Artist my foot! Everything else, but not that. Or only once. Where? In *Androcles and the Lion*.

And again :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR CARYL BRAHMS,

I read in your column yesterday :

"The scene of Antony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire* is set in a small town in 1900—so small that a searchlight of scandalised curiosity plays over Hagar. She is in love with a man whom she believes to be in love with her younger sister, and fears that she will share the fate of her elder sister—a spinster. These three sisters have not the slightest desire to go to Moscow, or its Middle West equivalent. They are in search of a moderate meed of happiness. Hagar gives herself to a man she does not love, only to have the man she does love given back to her. This is the story of the ballet—fit material for Du Maupassant. And Tudor has set it to the ineffable music of Schönberg's 'Verklaarte Nacht.'"

This is just to say that I have made a ballet out of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* set to the ineffable music of Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik." Do you think you could get Covent Garden interested?

Incidentally who is this "*Du Maupassant*"?

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

# The Gentle Art of Keeping Friends.

To Dilys Powell :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR DILYS,

How scrumptiously good you are in to-day's *S.T.* You are absolutely right about *A Night in Casablanca*, though I haven't seen the film. That shows what a good reader of criticism I am ! I hardly dare go to it. Somebody tells me that some young woman says, "I stop at this hotel," and Groucho Marx replies, "I stop at nothing !" It can't be as good as that all through, and that's what makes me hesitate. I put Groucho with the very great comics—Chaplin, Little Tich, and Grock.

Yes, my dear, you are a very great critic—until you start that nonsense about the visual effect of an undone bootlace while not caring two hoots if the owner of the boot is going upstairs when by all the laws of logic he should be coming downstairs. My other monitress said to me at *Boys' Ranch*—DON'T see that unless you adore freckles and Butch Jenkins—Lejeune said, "You must like Dilys if you like me. We're halves. I'm all heart, and Dilys is all brain." So bless your dear heart, dear brain !

Ever,  
J. A.

And now arrives a charming letter :

I am a British working-man, acquaintance with journalism began 55 years ago by selling newspapers at the age of 9 on London's streets. Finished with school at 11½—St Andrew's Church School, Willesden Green. Am just finishing your Autobiography : *Ego*, *Ego* 2, 3, 4, and nearly read 5, and would like to tell you how thoroughly I have enjoyed all five volumes—the best treat after Arnold Bennett's *Journals*. Our £1000-a-year Lambeth Librarian has had all your volumes strongly bound, and they are in great demand. Some time back I presented the Library at Brixton with Voltaire's *La Pucelle*, which the librarian has also had bound—"variants" and all ! As he is so discriminating and appreciative, I purpose leaving the Library my copy of Diderot's *Les bijoux indiscrets* ! It is strange that in all your Diary you have never mentioned Denis Diderot ! ?

Did poor old Zola really die "with his nose in *le boudin*," as mentioned page 213. *Ego* 5 ? I thought I knew quite a lot about Emile. I had a handbill once, which was distributed on the Paris streets circa 1898 : on one side calling him all the "dirty Jewish bastards unhanged" ; on the reverse side, in type three inches high, the one word : "*M E R D E* " ! After this he came to live in a hotel near the Crystal Palace here for a time. Old Dreyfus, cold

as ice, never as much as thanked Zola for his efforts and sacrifices on his behalf.

Mentioning Zola : I thought, Sir, the little bit of pure Gallic on page 4, col. 2 of the new Normandy weekly *Cité Nouvelle*, of 1/6/46 : "Des W. C. ! S. V. P. !" might interest you ? You couldn't read such in the *Sunday Times* or the *Daily Express*. I like the "... les dockers doivent se 'plier' ... sur les quais, aux exigences de la nature." This (enclosed) is number 5 of the new Rouen Normandy Socialist weekly. It was at Barentin, near, that Zola staged his train smash in *La Bête Humaine*, which recently ran as a film at the Curzon here, but at such high price of admission, I couldn't afford to see it. The film has since disappeared from England !

Please forgive me if I'm a boor, and have written boorishly. You're a busy man, and so am I. But I felt impelled to let you know, although so late in the day (we can't afford to *buy* your tomes !), how very much a working-man has enjoyed *Ego* 1 to 5. Je tiens à ce que vous sachiez que je vous serai toujours reconnaissant pour l'aide remarquable que vous nous avez apportée.

The cutting :

Des W. C. ! S. V. P. !

L'homme a besoin, pour maintenir une vitalité indispensable, d'ingérer des substances connues sous le nom d'aliments.

Hélas ! tout ne peut être digéré ! Hélas ! le corps a besoin de se débarrasser de certain détrit, et voilà pourquoi, dans certains quartiers de la ville, on voit des " chalets de nécessité."

Mais, ce que l'on reconnaît utile aux promeneurs, ne pourrait-on le donner aussi à ceux qui travaillent et peinent dur ?

Un docker, voyons, c'est un homme, et ce docker, travaillant par exemple quai de la Garonne, doit aller jusqu'à la " General Motors " pour soulager sa personne de ce gênant fardeau.

Il n'y a pas toujours d'usine aux alentours et les dockers doivent se " plier " ... sur les quais, aux exigences de la nature.

Un docker, messieurs les P. A. H., doit être considéré comme étant aussi digne d'intérêt qu'un rond de cuir quelconque.

Un peu d'hygiène, voyons.

I have replied :

Many thanks for your delightful letter. Diderot ? You will find an allusion in *Ego* 3, p. 56. *Re* Zola's death. George Moore writes in *Impressions and Opinions* :

" Zola has no love of money, he has squandered all he made on vulgar decoration and absurd architecture. . . . He wrote for four hours every morning at a novel, and every afternoon he wrote an article for a newspaper, and those who have felt the pressure of a weekly article, while engaged on a work of the imagination, will



appreciate the severity of the ordeal that Zola bore for many years unflinchingly. . . . The influence of Manet and Flaubert and Goncourt persuaded him that he was interested in the external world, and we hailed *L'Assommoir* as a masterpiece, for we wished to group ourselves round some great writer. . . . We believed that he would cultivate refinement of thought, and refinement of literary expression. But Zola was not naturally an artist. Instead of the books becoming more and more beautiful, they have become larger, looser, and uglier, and they serve no purpose whatsoever, except to find money for the purchase of cock-eyed saints on gold backgrounds. Alas ! The ridiculous towers of Médan ! Alas ! the arrival of translators from Paraguay ! Alas, the blowing of trumpets before the Lord Mayor of London in honour of *La Terre*, *La Débâcle*, *L'Argent*, and *Docteur Pascal* ! And, three times, alas, for are we not now menaced by a novel on Lourdes, on Rome, and on Paris ? In these novels he will re-write everything that he has written before. His friends will drop away from him ; he will be left alone ; his excellent cigars will fail to attract us, and smoking bad ones in the café we shall regret his life and his works, and the mistake we made ; and when the café closes we shall stand on the pavement wondering what the end will be. One of us will say, it will probably be Huysmans : ' In *Le Ventre de Paris* there is a pork butcher who, after having worked ten hours a day all his life, is found dead sitting before a table *son nez dans le boudin*.' ' And you think,' I shall say, ' that he will just drop from sheer exhaustion over his writing-table *son nez dans le boudin* ? ' Huysmans will not answer, he will remember that Zola is the friend of his life."

Zola was found dead in the bedroom of his Paris house, having been accidentally asphyxiated by the fumes from a defective flue. The film showed this happening at his work-table in his study, which is nearer to Moore's conception. You are not quite fair to Dreyfus. Zola was given a public funeral, and Dreyfus was present at it. I send you a picture of myself looking up at the famous article in *L'Aurore*, one of my most treasured possessions.

I have published *Egos* 6 and 7. No. 8 is due this autumn, and I am half-way through No. 9. I hope nobody will refer to my work as *le boudin* !

Many thanks for the cutting. It is delicious.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

JAMES AGATE

*July 8*      The affair with the *Express* continues to repercuss.  
*Monday.*    From a letter :

I would like to remind you that these dull, absurd, and uncultured people form a formidable part of this country—in fact, they constitute the strength and character of this country. Which is more than can be said for some of the personalities who float like

pathetic, comic images around London's West End—so full of "good theatre, good music, good food, good conversation" that a pick and shovel in their hands and a breath of God's clean air would do them a world of good. A bricklayer is important to the community. We can't do without bricklayers, but we can well do without the company of poseurs, epicures, and the rest of this small and, thank goodness, dwindling number of "stranded gentry" who still claim special privileges by virtue of a background and an upbringing fortuitously bestowed on them. These people didn't make this nation or any other nation; they are merely the parasites which decorate it.

My reply:

I do and don't agree with you that a good bricklayer is better than a bad poet. I won't maintain that a great poet is worth ten thousand bricklayers, for the reason that 'worth' connotes scales, and you cannot weigh sonnets against dwelling-houses. The point is that a novel about social riff-raff written by a Ronald Firbank amuses me more than a novel about a Dorsetshire bricklayer unless the novelist happens to be a Thomas Hardy. I am aware that Flaubert's best novel is about the wife of a provincial doctor. But the book was written from the outside, so to speak; Flaubert doesn't want you to feel that the world would be a better place if all the women in it were Emma Bovarys. Whereas you, like Priestley, are obviously convinced that a human species composed of Yorkshire manufacturers would be ideal.

Of course we can't do without the people who build our houses, grow, bring and cook our food, dispose of our refuse, and keep the streets clean. But would you like to live in a palace, wear sumptuous clothes, stuff yourself with all imaginable delicacies, sleep on the softest of beds, and enjoy innumerable concubines if it meant having no books to read, no music to listen to, no pictures to look at, no reasonable conversation? I should hate it. I could be bounded in a hovel, and very nearly am. My curtains are rotting, my carpets are in rags, and my bookcases are falling to pieces. I have worn the same white linen collar for six days, and it is filthy, and my food is mostly atrocious. Yet I still count myself king of infinite space. My subjects are social riff-raff who have drunk themselves into their graves, died of syphilis, or stupidly got themselves into gaol.

There is a modern craze for educating the lower classes. I don't believe in it. I should hate to think that the driver of my express train has any views on Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos*. What I want him to have views on is when to open and when to shut the throttle of his engine. If he knows how to do that, and does it, I don't care if, at the end of his day's work, he gets blind drunk, takes some trollop home, undresses her in front of his wife, and gives that poor wretch a couple of black eyes because she isn't amused.

**July 9** Letter to a man accusing me of getting on my high moral  
**Tuesday.** horse :

*Moral*, you idiot ? In all my seven, getting on for eight, million words you won't find a single word about morality in its sexual connotation. Do you remember the idiosyncrasies of Felix, Savarel, Pradon, and Saphius ? What, you don't know your *Venus and Tannhäuser*, Beardsley's original version of *Under the Hill* ? I still have my privately printed copy given me in 1910 by George Mair and inscribed "To J. E. A. To be read once a year this thoroughly disgraceful book which, happily, he will not in the least understand. G. H. M." No, sir, I have no morals, nor is my criticism intended to be moral in the matter of the caprices of the body. My truck is with the minds of great men. George Moore used to laud to the skies a short story by Balzac entitled *Une Passion dans le Désert*, all about a pantheress "that met a soldier starving in the desert, and taken with a sudden fancy galloped off and brought him back the hind quarter of an antelope, and in such wise continued to feed the soldier for many months ; . . . Balzac tells the story of this strange caprice with rare intensity." But why do things laudable in deserts become impermissible in Regent's Park ? Why should I be shocked if a polar bear should offer a Chelsea pensioner a bun in exchange for a hug ? But the brain-pan of the English doesn't work that way. I don't know a single ratepayer who would not sacrifice *The Importance of Being Earnest* for the assurance that its author had led a life as blameless as that of the Rev. Robert Spalding.

Came across this in Hazlitt apropos of Charles Kean :

We do not say no great actor improves, but no actor becomes great by improvement. Garrick fell as it were from the clouds ; Mr Kean's father rose at once from obscurity.

A hard saying for any young actor. But true. A great actor is like a great harness horse. He is there or he isn't. I should know if a really great horse entered the ring though I had my back turned to him. I should recognise a great actor in my sleep.

Dined at Cherkley, Lord Beaverbrook's beautiful place at Leatherhead. Three other guests, including two lovely ladies. The Beaver in great form. We began with a jeroboam . .

**July 10** *A Night in Casablanca* is frankly a disappointment.  
**Wednesday.** This film has suffered from one of two things—either Groucho has not been given a free hand, or his wit has begun to fall off. I am tempted almost to embark on an essay entitled *Grandeur et Décadence de Groucho Marx*. There is still the old impishness, that lascivious leer in which only the whites of the

eyes are seen, that bland delight in enormity. There is even Tarquin's ravishing stride. But, alas! there is too little to be impish about or leer at, no dowager to be kicked in the stomach, and no Lucrece to rape. Groucho, in this film, is like a singer who has nothing left but his style. And yet how good he might have been, and what chances he might have had as a hotel manager whose three predecessors have been bumped off. The late A. B. Walkley said that if Groucho had been a dramatic critic he would have blandly thrust his feet through the seat of his chair and with them written better criticism than Sainte-Beuve. If Groucho had only been allowed to manage that hotel in his own way he would, I feel sure, have put his feet through his desk and with them given demonstrations of hotel-management at which Ritz would have boggled and Carlton gaped.

And then whoever made this film made a first-class mistake in allowing Sig Ruman to have any share in it. I have for years admired this actor, the greatest master of controlled exasperation that I have ever seen. "Can anybody wonder, like him?" asked Lamb of Munden. And I ask, "Can anybody bottle wrath like Ruman, and with such extraordinary comic effect?" He has a scene with Harpo and Chico, and behold, the two more celebrated clowns disappear. I can bear this. What I cannot bear is that Groucho should fade into the light of common day.

July 11            From Christopher Fry :  
Thursday.

*Shipton-under-Wychwood  
Oxfordshire*

DEAR JAMES,

Bless you for reading and returning the *Phœnix* so speedily. I can only wish you'd found some amusement in it for your pains, but, alas, it seems to have been a very solemn affair to you and not a joke at all. I can't defend it, of course. If to you it isn't funny, to you it isn't funny: but I can answer one or two of your queries.

You're probably very right about Dynamene's "mad blacksmith" speech not being feminine, but you're wrong to think I wrote it for high poetry: It was meant to be mock heroics, to be laughing at a certain kind of verse, to be a joke (why else should I have said "oceans bud with porpoises, blenny, tunny"?): and all it means is that there are a hell of a lot of things in the world but they're all as good as nothing now that her husband is dead.—Yes: "the sand puts out the lion roaring yellow" is ambiguous,

I can see that. I meant "begets," as in "the branches put out shoots"—shouldn't it be clear following, as it does, the roots sizzling into hyacinth and orchis, and preceding the ocean budding with porpoises, etc. ?

As for the "dreadful" line : "And very pleasant too. Did I interrupt you ?" you can't pretend to me, Jimmy, that you didn't know it was meant to be comic bathos. You know it's a trick I have all the way through, following the flickers of poetry : as I prick the bubble of the love-scene with "Is your husband expecting you ?" And the laughs come and that's what I want.

No, you don't win your case by quoting passages which were never meant to be poetry in order to prove that I can't write it.

If it weren't my own play there's a good deal I should enjoy arguing about. Perhaps when I'm in London again we can ? Or perhaps we let the subject drop ? I'll try to give you some verse in the new play which will give us less to argue about.

Ever sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER FRY

I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR CHRISTOPHER,

So that's what highbrows laugh at ? Well, well, well ! But I mistrust, and I think Beaumarchais would have mistrusted, the playwright who can be humorous only in verse. "What is unfunny in prose . . ." However, I confess that "blenny, tunny" made me think of "linnet ! chaffinch ! bullfinch ! goldfinch ! greenfinch !" Perhaps you should have used Sheridan's exclamation marks, "connoting *espièglerie*"—to use my and Alan Dent's phrase. However, it's nice of you to take my non-appreciation so charmingly.

Ever,

J. A.

P.S. Is *This Way to the Tomb* meant to be funny too ? And what started all this wild hilarity—*Murder in the Cathedral* ?

The Gentle Art :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR SCOTT GODDARD,

You write in the *News Chronicle* to-day :

"It would be easy to dismiss with a smart phrase the eight movements of the French composer Olivier Messiaen's 'Quatuor pour la fin de Temps' for piano, violin, 'cello, and clarinet.

"Nevertheless, this is heartfelt music, having passages of much beauty.

"To me it seemed not only exasperating music but bad art ; the organist improvising ' meditations ' after the service."

Please tell a floundering dramatic critic, trying to find his way about the arts, how a heartfelt work containing much beauty can be exasperatingly bad art.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

*Vignette.* Hermione Gingold at the Ivy wearing a hat like a Martello tower with cascades of veiling, putting a bunch of carnations in her mouth à la Carmen, and saying with an atrocious leer, " Any gentleman like to strip to the waist ? "

*July 12* If anybody likes to present Boadicea as a combination of  
*Friday.* George Eliot and Mrs Humphry Ward I am quite willing, since I have no views about the Queen of the Iceni. Nor do I mind if Messalina is presented as a combination of Jane Shore and Mae West ; I have no views about Messalina. Whereas I have views about George Sand. I am certain that there was more ' to ' this tremendous figure than a pair of trousers, a top-hat, and a cigar. To begin with, she had the power of making people take her at her own valuation : did not her memorialist in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* as late as 1898 say of her that she was " the second, if not the greatest, of French novelists " ? She could, and did, pass herself off as a budding Rousseau-cum-Chateaubriand. She even gammoned a critic of her own nationality, no less a person than Sainte-Beuve, who, however, begins his essay in *Causeries du Lundi* with the words, " I have been for some time in arrears with Mme Sand." (I know a dramatic critic who intends always to be in arrears with Mme Sand.) History records that she was for a period on the staff of the *Figaro*, but that as she had neither wit nor piquancy her earnings at the end of the month did not amount to more than fifteen francs. Further, that she could be taciturnity itself, and would sit for hours together without a word, devouring her lovers with her sombre eyes. Now what is a playwright going to make of a woman who spends her time between moping in a corner and astonishing the Parisians with a new shape of top-hat ? And then her lovers, of whom she had as many as, according to Miss Mitford, the poet Cowley had mistresses ! Is the playwright to show us the novelist making herself ridiculous on the fond bosoms of Musset, Pagello, Heine, Liszt, Chopin, Sandeau, and Mérimée ? Or a selection of them ? Or none at all ? And then

there is the actress to be considered. If she is a showy actress the character must show off. Wherefore Mrs Patrick Campbell, when she played the author of *Consuelo*, got herself up in a costume which would have been appropriate equally to Little Lord Fauntleroy and Archibald Grosvenor. Wherefore she took the stage like a Spanish galleon in full sail. Wherefore she would have an idea—something about sunburnt cathedrals or music wooing the stars—and strike an attitude and look for her tablets and find it meet that she should set the cliché down. Was Mrs Pat going to shed her personal glamour to impersonate a hard-bitten egocentric who burned up her lovers under the pretence of mothering them? No. If I had to dish up George for popular entertainment I think I should use the film. My first shot would show this really frightening infant at the age of three crossing the Pyrenées to join her father, who was on Murat's staff, occupying with her parents a suite of rooms in the royal palace, adopted as the child of the regiment, nursed by rough old sergeants, and dressed in a complete suit of uniform to please the general. After the Shirley Temple stage I should show her falling into trances like Blake, and worshipping that deity of her own invention, the mysterious Corambé, half pagan and half Christian, and erecting to him a rustic altar made out of moss and ferns and pretty pebbles. Half-way through I would show her waking to find herself famous and, of course, donning the celebrated trousers. For pudicity's sake I should forget about her lovers, and end by showing the old girl in her garden at the age of seventy, surrounded by grandchildren, and writing the pants off Balzac. Why all this about G. S.? Because to-night's play at Hammersmith. *Summer at Nohant*, bored me stiff.

July 18            The Gentle Art. To-day's bag includes all women, the  
Saturday.        Editors of *Windmill*, and Macmillan's the publishers.

First the women. From my review of Vachell's *Now Came Still Evening On*:

Mr Vachell understands women very nearly as well as Lord Dunsany understands them. There is a scene in Dunsany's *Alexander* in which the Queen of the Amazons tells Alexander that if he wants to conquer her people he must come up against them with elephants and battering-rams, which the Amazons can't withstand, and not with spears, which they can. "And then?" says Alexander. "Well," says the Queen, smiling sweetly, "once you've destroyed my army and captured me, I shall be yours, shan't I?"

Next to the Editors of *Windmill* :

It is the mark of the highbrow to do things less accurately than the lowbrow. Why, for example, does the author of an otherwise admirable article on Hubert Crackanthorpe talk about "*Le Maison Tellier*," when every schoolboy knows that it is "*La Maison Tellier*" ? Why, further, does he make Henry James speak bad French ? Why does the clever author of *August Diary* give us an entry about Paul Valéry and get his name wrong ? Why are the most ordinary French accents omitted ? This has nothing to do with the rule of the magazine, since accents are given elsewhere. Why does the brilliant author of *Letter from Cambridge* publish a French poem of eight lines in which there are four mistakes ? Don't the Editors know that the word for 'in' is *dans* and not *danse*, that adjectives should agree with their nouns ? I am a very common, ordinary, lowbrow reader and reviewer, and this highbrow slovenliness annoys me. I am just as much annoyed as I should be if Henry Cotton at the first hole of a championship inadvertently turned his back on the hole and drove in the opposite direction. But then Cotton would be annoyed too, whereas our insufferable highbrows are so pleased with themselves that they wouldn't care if their editors printed them upside down, which they very nearly do.

Letter to Macmillan's :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR SIRs,

Why, in your new Book List, do you say " John Palmer succeeded Bernard Shaw as the dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review* " ? He didn't. Unless, of course, you hold that Henry II succeeded Henry I. Max Beerbohm is the Stephen in this case. Can you have forgotten G. B. S.'s valedictory " The younger generation is knocking at the door ; and as I open it there steps spritely in the incomparable Max. For the rest, let Max speak for himself. I am off duty for ever, and am going to sleep " ? Shaw's last article appeared on May 21, 1898 ; Max's first appeared on May 28, 1898. There was no interregnum. And Max reigned for twelve years.

Your obedient servant,

JAMES AGATE

Letter from a young gentleman at West Hampstead :

May I express the pious hope that ere long some Northern numbskull will seize you by the scruff of the neck, ram your hard little hat over your hard little head, thrust a cheap edition of *Madame Bovary* down your throat, and with cloddish contumely kick you off the end of Wigan Pier ?



July 14      Beverley Baxter sends me this :  
Sunday.

54 Hamilton Terrace  
N.W.8

MY DEAR JAMES,

That was a bad *gaffe* of mine about Maugham's play. I could not wait to see the last act of the production at the Lindsey, and asked an actor friend of mine if this was the play in which Haidée Wright had uttered the words about not forgiving God. He said that it was, and very wrongly I let it go at that. As for the extra 'e' in 'Walkley,' I am not responsible for the vagaries of compositors.

Now, my dear James, while I deeply appreciate your concern for my iniquities and your anxieties for my incompetence as a critic, I think perhaps you should recognise what you are yourself. You are that delightful creature, a *café wit*. You have no faith, no philosophy, and when you want real thought you summon the thinkers of the past. In fact, you are something between a resurrectionist and a cloakroom attendant for other men's thoughts. Your reverence for the past is almost as moving as that of Viscount Simon. He would rather quote the dullest platitude by an ancient Greek than quote the wit of a modern Scot. Therefore, when you find me writing that Shaw is a greater artist than he is a thinker you are horrified because it has not been said before. Your compass, your rudder are gone. The resurrectionist does not know which way to turn.

Then, wherein is your charm? You have excellent moods which play like footlights upon other men's thoughts and enhance their attractiveness. This is a valuable work and adds greatly to our pleasure on Saturday and Sunday mornings. For example, what could be better than your recent articles on the Provinces? It has all been said before, but you brought your own mood to it—and that is your supreme gift.

Now, my dear James, I do not give a damn what Hazlitt or Walkley said or anybody else. I do my own thinking, and if the result is terrible to you then remember that we do not come from the same womb. Go on quoting and I shall go on thinking.

With much affection,

BAX

July 15      *Men of Two Worlds*, at the Gaumont this morning, was  
Monday.      all about a negro composer-pianist performing at the  
National Gallery in London the piano part of his own  
*Bagwash*, or some such name, devised for piano, orchestra, and male  
choir. Well, I just don't believe in the negro pianist who, hav-  
ing tasted blood à la Myra Hess, feels himself compelled to fly to

Tanganyika to second Phyllis Calvert in her fight against the tsetse fly. My attention wandered, and when that happens I have very little control over where it wanders to. The negro pianist calling himself Kisenga, I found myself saying, "Kisenga—Gasenga—Gazingi. That's it, 'Miss Gazingi,' of course." And from that it was only a step to Miss Petowker, the only sylph Mr Crummles ever saw who could stand upon one leg and play the tambourine on the other knee, *like* a sylph. In Mr Crummles's opinion "The Blood Drinker" would die with that girl. Not that she was the original Blood Drinker. That honour belonged not to Petowker, but to Mrs Vincent Crummles, who was obliged to give it up. "Did it disagree with her?" asked Nicholas. And Mr Crummles replied, "Not so much with her as with her audiences. Nobody could stand it. It was too tremendous."

At this point my thoughts returned to the screen, where the witch-doctor was imbibing something that looked like crimson treacle, and Robert Adams was saying in an awed tone, "He's drinking my blood. I can't stand it. It's too tremendous!"

*July 16* Some twelve or fifteen dramatic critics gave a luncheon *Tuesday.* at the Savoy to John Mason Brown, the New York critic. Darlington made a dignified and elegant speech; my contribution was the recounting of a talk I had with J. M. B. at the time of the lease-lend bargaining:

J. A. Tell me, Brown. Why do you Americans, delightful individually, taken collectively add up to a nation of twerps?

J. M. B. All right, Agate. Why, with you Britishers, is the converse the case?

A jolly couple of hours with a good deal of wit and the best thing coming, as was right and proper, from our guest. The party took place in the Mikado Room. Somebody saying that Winston Churchill was lunching in the next room, J. M. B. said, "Ah, the Sorcerer Room, I feel sure!"

*July 17* *Vicious Circle*, the English version of *Huis Clos*, at the *Wednesday.* Arts Theatre to-night, gave one the chance to study Jean-Paul Sartre's new metaphysic for oneself. The notion I got from this excruciatingly boring play was that hell consists in what you look like to other people. As far as I am concerned this is nonsense. Hell for me is going to be how I appear to myself.

The play to-night was very well acted. There was even a moment of humour. This was when the Lesbian was asked how she came to be in hell. "Gas," replied the Lehmann, referring to a particular type of oven, but using the sepulchral tones in which, in the Dorothy Parker story, the celebrated, gin-soaked actress Lily Wynton alluded to another affliction.

*July 18* Cochran ! The name comes o'er my ear like the sweet  
*Thursday.* South, breathing upon a bank of violets, stealing and giving odour. One hundred and twenty-four visions of colour and design, dreams of fair women and clever actresses. Delysia, Spinelly, Florence Mills. But for the time-factor it might have been with some memory of a Cochran revue that Kipling's exile sang to his banjo :

In the twilight, on a bucket upside down,  
Hear me babble what the weakest won't confess—  
I am Menlory and Torment—I am Town !  
I am all that ever went with evening dress !

But what has this magician to do with political satire ? " The word poltic surprises by himself," said Count Smorltork. Yes, but in the old days it was Cochran who surprised by himself, and there was nothing in to-night's *Big Ben* (A. P. Herbert and Vivian Ellis, Adelphi Theatre) to spring a surprise about. Shall suggest on Sunday that a part—say, of Lord Chancellor or Speaker—be instantly written in and Fred Emney sent for. Surely in a comic opera there should be one funny character ? Let the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition doze off and give us their Cochranesque dreams. Let the lady members pirouette on the Terrace and give us twiddle instead of twaddle. Let Trefor Jones substitute songs of his own choosing—Handel, Rachmaninoff, Wolf, the stuff he sings at the Savage Club on Saturday nights. C. B., put on short commons in the matter of wit and beauty, is like a juggler denied his cigar, top-hat, and umbrella. A. P. H. was accorded a call and, what is more, took it !

*July 19* Supper to-night to Lillian Gish, looking lovely in a cowl  
*Friday.* and opals. I had asked Jock, Wilfred Rouse, and Bertie van Thal, and we were like fervents at the shrine of a young and witty saint. An enchanting evening, in the course of which she gave me her handkerchief, now being put under glass, and

I told her that her fame rested not upon her art, but upon the lovely, *baby* contour of her forehead.

*July 20* Found this note from Jock pushed under my door :  
*Saturday.*

33 *King Street*  
*Covent Garden, W.C.2*

DEAR JAMIE,

The lady you had us to sup with last night was so like Lillian Gish that it took my breath away and left me an infatuated oaf—I dare say rather like Phiz's view of Mr Guppy in the theatre pit staring up at Esther Summerson in the circle, his hand on his heart. Now and again I managed to desist from my gaze at her to give a glance at you, and I must say you were pretty Guppyish yourself. I had a sharp pang of jealous rage when you claimed and were granted her dear, minute handkerchief. But I reckon I scored over you (for she gave me the sweetest smile out of her eyes) when you said you'd drive her back to the Savoy and I said Nonsense, I'd carry her back !

But you won all the time in the talk, of course. You had that triumphant *aperçu* in comparing her to the Madonna herself—the ageless demure little mouth is exactly that of a Raphael or a Perugini Madonna, whereas the poise of the head is Botticellian—if it isn't just that of a primrose fretting at the dew. But, heavens, what clish-ma-claver between a couple of ageing men !

Your daft, grateful,

JOCK

P.S. Her wistful smile haunts me still. She is an Unbroken Blossom—a flower that time has mysteriously overlooked. And I say, did you notice the respect amounting to awe with which she once or twice referred to “Mr Griffith” ?—when your normal piece of pretty film-mindlessness would say “Griffith” or “D. W. G.” Admirable !

*July 22* Devas Jones, my C.O. in the last war, turned up at the  
*Monday.* Café Royal. He said, “Seventeen years ago you told me not to come back from Africa until I had acquired white hair and a thousand pounds. I've got both, and arthritis as well !” All the old charm. He said, “There are things in East Africa that you couldn't do over here. Could you, my dear James, dine at the same table with the public hangman, a man under sentence of death afterwards reprieved, and a man who was later on hanged ?” Wants to get back. “Come to Kenya, where the Zoo looks at you, and not you at the Zoo !”

**July 28** Lunch at the Savoy with Lillian and Dorothy Gish, who  
**Tuesday.** give me champagne and wave at me the current number  
of *Theatre To-day*, in which I have two pages about George  
Joan Nathan ! In this I find I am made to write, " Let's *calve* him  
as a dish fit for the gods " ! ! ! !

**July 24** From a letter : " Have you ever heard yourself read  
**Wednesday.** poetry (by recording, of course) on the wireless ? Like  
boiled lemonade, isn't it ? "

**July 25** A sweltering night, and a play by Dryden ! I feel  
**Thursday.** inclined to say about *Marriage à la Mode* what Hazlitt  
said about one of Godwin's tragedies : " We can hardly  
think it would have been possible for him to have failed, but on the  
principle here stated : *viz.*, that it was impossible for him to succeed."  
The moment we start on the play within the play the modern  
spectator, or at least one modern spectator, is sunk. The story of the  
Usurper of Sicily is flat, intolerable fudge, told in verse that is worse.  
I don't believe that any interest now attaches, or ever attached, to  
this story of Thermogene, Polygamous, Pabulum, and Uvula, or  
whatever their wretched names are. Sixteen years ago I began my  
notice of the Hammersmith revival with the sentence : " Nobody is  
going to risk saying that Dryden is a dull dog." Well, I shall risk it  
on Sunday. Not too well acted. John Clements and Robert Eddison  
goodish, but Melantha a disappointment, principally because Kay  
Hammond chose to be inaudible.

**July 26** In the *Daily Express* :  
**Friday.**

When, in the 'nineties, the controversy over Ibsen was at its  
height the late A. B. Walkley asked why people made so much fuss  
over " a respectable, elderly Scandinavian who lives at Munich,  
taking from time to time a few whiffs at a very short pipe. Why  
cannot they make up their minds to like him or lump him ? "  
Similarly with regard to to-day's respectable Irishman embarking  
on his personal nineties in Hertfordshire without the aid of tobacco.  
Surely we made up our minds about him years ago ? Why, then,  
the fuss ? Because Shaw is a very great man, and it is fitting that  
in the winter of old age . . . But this is nonsense. Shaw will  
never be old.

" Had I three ears, I'd hear thee," said Shakespeare's Macbeth.  
Had G. B. S. thirty mouths he would speak with all of them. Let  
us see what mouths he has. Musical critic, literary critic, dramatic

critic, social critic, novelist, dramatist, polemist, economist, vestryman, educationalist, scenarist, wit. Well, that's twelve of them. I propose, in the short space at my disposal, to discuss two aspects of Shaw—Shaw the dramatic critic and Shaw the dramatist.

Shaw is the greatest of English dramatic critics after Hazlitt and G. H. Lewes. Hear him on himself :

“ I consider that Lewes in some respects anticipated me, especially in his free use of vulgarity and impudence whenever they happened to be the proper tools for his job.”

And more seriously :

“ The cardinal guarantee for a critic's integrity is simply the force of the critical instinct itself. If my own father were an actor-manager, and his life depended on his getting favourable notices of his performance, I should orphan myself without an instant's hesitation if he acted badly.”

And this superb thing which goes to the very roots of criticism :

“ Whoever has been through the experience of discussing criticism with a thorough, perfect, and entire “Ass has been told that criticism should above all things be free from personal feeling.”

I say “ Amen ” to this. “ Amen ” does *not* stick in my throat. Which brings me to Shaw the dramatist.

Of that popular opera Verdi's *Il Trovatore* G. B. S. wrote : “ It is absolutely void of intellectual interest ; the appeal is to the instincts and to the senses all through.” Shaw's drama is absolutely void of romanticism ; the appeal is to the intellect and to the reasoning powers throughout. What dramatist with a visual sense of the theatre would in *Saint Joan* have followed the pow-wow in the English tent with the pow-wow in the ambulatory, by-passing the coronation ? The truth about Shaw the dramatist is that he is a theorist passionately interested in humanity and caring nothing about people, an upholder of the Life Force who finds no fun in living. As Chesterton said : “ Shaw has always had a secret ideal that has withered all the things of this world. He has all the time been silently comparing humanity with something that was not human. . . .”

For the greater part of ninety years this Great Man has given himself, his energy, the vigour of his superb intellect, to the construction of a world in which not one per cent. of the human race would want to live. A world without red meat, beer, cigarettes, pipes, horse and dog races, cricket and football matches, saloon bars, darts. A world without flowers, which commit the sin of being decorative instead of functional. A world in which everybody argues interminably round a table, refreshing himself from time to time with a little grass and some cold water. Like that character in Dryden, G. B. S. has “ made almost a sin of

abstinence." A world without women in the feminine sense, but full of harpies pursuing the potential fathers of their children, viragoes screaming that they are the votaries of Creative Evolution. This is the world that Shaw's plays are about. A world conditioned by Pure Thought.

What sticks most in my playgoing throat? Many years ago Shaw wrote of Shakespeare: "With the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I can despise so entirely as I despise Shakespeare when I measure my mind against his." Speaking for Shakespeare, I say that when Troilus has his "I am giddy; expectation whirls me round," he is saying what every lover in the world has felt. And that when, in *Man and Superman*, Tanner has his "I love you. The Life Force enchants me," he is pretending to feel what no lover has ever felt, or will feel to the end of time.

Shaw is not an artist, because he knows and despises the kind. "The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go barefoot, his mother drudge for his living at seventy sooner than work at anything but his art. Perish the race and wither a thousand women if only the sacrifice of them enable him to act Hamlet better, to paint a finer picture, to write a deeper poem, a greater play, a profounder philosophy." That is why the plays of Shaw the sociologist are discussions about the nature of God, whereas the plays of Shakespeare the dramatist are about the nature of Man. The author of *Back to Methuselah* is concerned with As Far As Thought Can Reach; the author of *Othello* with how far emotion can feel. Well, it is for the playgoer to choose. On the one hand, a mysterious female clasping He and She Ancients to her chilly breasts. On the other an unhappy man, perplex'd in the extreme, saying,

"Here is my journey's end, here is my butt,  
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail."

Why, then, all the fuss? Because of a "stream of mind" which, like that of another Irishman, Edmund Burke, has been perpetual. Because mind is mind, whether you agree with it or not. Because always, once in every play, some speech is unloosed in which you hear Shaw's thirteenth voice, which might be the voice of Isaiah. Some such speech as that in *Good King Charles's Golden Days*, in which Shaw, using Kneller as his mouthpiece, praises the Creator in that "He has seen fit nowhere to repeat Himself, since there are no two things—suns, moons, stars, men, fishes, birds, beasts, flowers, landscapes, consciences—alike and not to be differentiated in the entire created universe."

A world peopled by Shaws would be unthinkable? I see no danger of this. One Shaw was unthinkable till he happened; two is impossible. There have never been two Shakespeares, two Mozarts, two Leonardos, two Dan Lenos. There will not be two Shaws. For Shaw is a genius, and genius knows no duplication.

**July 29**      Supper last night at the Dorchester with Basil Cameron,  
**Monday.**      always a magnificent host, and Gwen Chenhalls. Such a cold that an exquisite hock was wasted on me, and I could tell salmon from Welsh rarebit only by the texture. What a highbrow would call intellectual appreciation of good food. Afterwards Basil gave me a photograph of himself, which he said I might use in *Ego* provided I gave his caption : " Shall I take my niblick ? " He was in great form and full of good stories. I liked one about Beecham, who had been asked by some ass whether he did not admire Beethoven. " Beethoven," said T. B., ' is the Dogberry of music.' " I told them how the management of the Proms had sent me the season's programme and asked me to indicate which concerts I should like to attend. And how I had replied, " Every concert in which there is nothing by any living British composer." Basil said, " As I am engaged to conduct some of these gentlemen's works . . ." I then said that Bucalossi (*Grasshoppers' Dance*) and Kern (*Showboat*) were better composers than Shostakovitch—a remark which was met with a smile and half a wink. Basil is the most conscientious of men. Told us that throughout the concert season he never opens a newspaper. " I keep my eyes for score-correcting."

Lunched to-day with Leonard Russell, who said he thought that August 4, 1914, marked the end of the age of culture and the beginning of the age of frustration. " Young people to-day have not enough talent to fill the old forms, and are driven to invent new forms to conceal their lack of talent." Told me he had spent some time with Dorothy and Lillian Gish. " They could talk of nothing and nobody except you, James, and what a gentle, sensitive, gracious person you are. I stood this for two hours, after which *I told them the truth !* "

Two letters. The first from a masseuse who wants to know if she should write a book about her experiences. " They begin with a woman who suffered from flatulence. She mistook this for an immaculate conception, and was very worried about it." The second, from an ex-Captain in the Royal Artillery, begins :

I inherit, through study, small portions of the brains of Clerk-Maxwell, Einstein, Rutherford, and gigantic Newton. They are superior in wit, beauty of thought, and perception to your beloved Shakespeare, to Johnson and Lamb. I am a Welshman who also speaks and writes a nobler and grander language than the mongrel English.



*July 30 Tuesday.* Welsh preachers getting into their stride lash themselves into an emotional frenzy by the use of a singing cadence called, I believe, the *hwyl*. It is a kind of prolonged, controlled, and rational hysteria. Sybil Thorndike *hwyl'd* most effectively to-night at the G. B. S. Celebration organised by the International Arts Guild, at which I had been bullied into taking the chair. But then, in opening the proceedings, I had given dear Sybil something to *hwyl* about. Here is what I said :

We are met together to-night to honour a great man. A very great man. A great dramatist who has never wrung a tear from any playgoer. St Joan ? She argues like blazes, and one feels that blazes are her appropriate end. The author of a vast number of acclaimed masterpieces each of which loses by being transferred to the stage. A dramatist without any sense of the theatre. A playwright inferior, as a maker of plays, to Goldsmith, Sheridan, Pinero, Wilde, Galsworthy, but with more brains in his little finger than the others had in their entire bodies. The writer of deathless prefaces to plays which are now dying, if not dead. In other words, a very great master, who can afford to neglect the antipathies and allergies, if there is such a word, of lesser minds. It is here that the critical instinct asserts itself. The fact that I happen to dislike Sibelius will not make me declare that Sibelius is a puling composer. The fact that I do not happen to like the shape of a mountain does not make me deny its height. I hope never again to see any play by Shaw acted in a theatre ; I would brain any man who stole one from my shelves. Forty years ago I attended a meeting of the Manchester Playgoers' Club. The chairman was his Honour Judge Parry, an indifferent playwright who never got over the fact that he was supposed to be a wag. He said, "We are to discuss this evening"—and I will remind you that the year was 1906—"the tendencies of the modern drama. And I shall rule out of order any allusion to the plays of Mr Shaw." The whirligig of time brings in his revenges, and as your chairman to-night I shall rule out any allusion to the plays of Mr Shakespeare. Night and day, height and depth, plus and minus are not more opposite than these two geniuses. I am aware of the metaphysical difficulty, and expect Dr Joad to tell me that you cannot discuss black without reference to white. I don't care. It is my ruling that no mention shall be made this evening of Shakespeare, and I do this in the hope that it will give some rest to that spirit which Mr Shaw has so often, so wilfully, and so woefully perturbed.

Joad followed Sybil, and I itched to correct him but didn't. This was when he said that coming out of a Shaw play he felt pity for the people he saw coming out of a revue at the Ambassadors. I wanted to ask whether one may not like *La Fille de Madame Angot* as well as Wagner's *Ring*. Then came Professor Denis Saurat, who made a

brilliant speech about Shaw being this country's only writer of prose, everybody else persisting in a degenerate, broken-down, but essentially poetic form. Wherefore, he argued, intellectually speaking Shaw was a Frenchman. (Incidentally he whispered to me that I was quite right about Shaw as non-dramatist.) Then Harriet Cohen, who told us some of Shaw's mildest jokes, which brought me to my feet with some of his fiercest. Then to supper, and afterwards to Priestley's flat, where for two hours, to the accompaniment of admirable brandy, we yarned and chatted and he enlarged on his pet theory that a dramatist should not be content to fill old forms with new matter but discover or invent new forms. "Expanding the theatre" he calls it. I asked him for a copy of his *Herald* article on Shaw, from which I cull :

My own view, which is probably prejudiced by the fact that I am a dramatist myself, is that G. B. S. is a great man who has written fine plays, which is not quite the same thing as being specifically a great dramatist. He found a form—the comedy of debate—to suit himself, and in my opinion all his best work for the Theatre is in this form, but he succeeded because of the sheer force of intellect he brought to the job and not because he was born for the Theatre.

Here Jack and I see eye to eye. Shaw has never realised that the amount of truth and sincerity in the multiplication table does not make that table a play.

*July 31* At the C. R. to-night I was handed a card on which was  
*Wednesday.* written, "May I come over and buy you a drink?"  
Feeling out of sorts and tired, I scribbled "No" in large capitals. The card came back: "Do you mind if I buy myself one?" Turned out to be a charming man of forty-five. *Did not mention the theatre.*

*Aug. 1* Finding myself opposite Lillian Gish at a supper-party,  
*Thursday.* I told her to move down a couple of places:  
Thou art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet  
That the sense aches at thee.

Dorothy told me that Alexander Woollcott said to her shortly before his death, "Doctors want to keep you alive. I want to live."

*Aug. 2* *Winged Words.* No. 16:  
*Friday.*

It is no longer permissible to dismiss Jazz with a little misapplied æsthetic criticism and some pseudo-ethnology. . . . Above

all, it is important to kill the misconception that Jazz is the unhealthy exhalation of a primeval jungle, that it is either an outlet for the oversexed or a stimulant for the undersexed. As music, it compares well with any that has come out of this country; and its worth is not only musical. The rolling bass is not the drugged frenzy of an alcoholic Negro, nor the echo of an atavistic tom-tom. An imaginative person might feel in it the pulse of a civilisation which protested in vain.

*Article in highbrow magazine*

Aug. 3            Taking a tip from something Leonard Russell said the  
Saturday.        other day, I maintained on the wireless to-night against  
                     some clever young man that "Life ceased to be elegant,  
amusing, civilised, and enjoyable on August 4, 1914, thirty-two years  
come to-morrow." I began :

You are entitled to ask "elegant, amusing, civilised, and enjoyable for whom?" You may tell me that this is a better world than ever before for dock-labourers, horse-slaughterers, dustmen. I am not a dock-labourer, horse-slaughterer, dustman. But suppose I were. What sort of world is this into which I should be bringing my children? A world in which they can't cross the street without a high degree of probability that they will be brought home dead or maimed for life. A world in which there is almost no chance of their reaching the age of twenty. Maniacs under the name of scientists have already split the atom, and are preparing to split anything smaller if they can find it. My children are henceforth at the mercy of any lunatic pressing a button in Patagonia, Peru, or Ponder's End.

Then a lot of stuff with which readers of *Ego* will be familiar.  
And ended :

And so I could go on. There is no longer any art of architecture. Pull down your old Georgian houses, run up your block of flats to look like public wash-houses and everybody's happy. I am supposed to admire pictures in which a man's mouth is situated in the middle of his forehead, and to make up for having no ears he has three eyes, and a geranium growing out of his nose. In the matter of music I am to admire filthy noises by swing trumpeters which would make an African witch-doctor hush. You tell me that I have talked only of the Arts, which are a decoration upon Life and not its stuff? That the material world is a better place than ever it was? I don't believe it. The young man of to-day thinks of nothing except dog-racing, and the young woman eats, drinks, sleeps, and thinks nothing but nylons. All around me I hear talk of the right to strike and never of the obligation to work. Oceans of talk about higher wages and fewer hours, but never a word about doing one's job thoroughly, accurately, competently.

I live in a world where taxi-drivers won't wait, bus-conductors are rude, and a collar takes six weeks to wash. A world in which there are no longer ladies and gentlemen, but merely people with more money and more leisure to spend it in. A world which has not realised that if you abolish distinctions you automatically do away with distinction. A world in which, as a returning soldier said to me the other day, "There's nothing to eat, nothing to drink, nothing to smoke, and you're damned lucky if you can find anywhere to sleep." A world in which the telephone doesn't work. A world in which nothing works. A world which has ceased to be fun.

*Aug. 4* Letter received during the week from an unknown friend :  
*Sunday.*

It was September 1902, one velvety black midnight in the Karroo, at a little railway station at De Aar, in the Cape, 500 miles from Capetown. My family were returning to the Transvaal, four months after the Peace at Vereeniging. We were all in a tiny little waiting-room, furnished with benches and a table on which was the usual massive Bible which the railways provided in South Africa. It was hot and oppressive, and I could not sleep, so I walked out on to the platform. In the Karroo desert the nights are wonderful—pitch black, with not a star to be seen, and you could not see your hand before your face. But it was cool and fresh. Far away, miles away, I thought I saw a little golden light, just a pinpoint. At first I thought it was a bush-fire, but it was too small and confined for that. It couldn't be a star; it was too low on the ground. Then I heard the noise of a train approaching, the golden light grew bigger and brighter, and presently the train came into the station, slowed down, and stopped. Most of the carriages were in darkness, the passengers were asleep. But one compartment was lit, and in it I saw what to me then was a fairy queen. And she was singing. Two men in evening dress were sitting in the compartment. I glued my nose to the window (I was ten), and the fairy queen, suddenly spotting me, ended her song with a gasp. One of the men opened the window. "It's only a little boy," he said. "Bring him in," she said. I was lifted into the compartment and stammered my explanation. I was enchanted and enthralled. She looked more like a fairy queen than ever, and wore a sort of silvery dress and what looked like a narrow crown in her dark hair. "Do you like singing?" she asked. I nodded. "Would you like me to sing to you?" Again I nodded; my heart was too full for words. One of the men picked up a violin lying on the seat and began to play. Then she sang. I thought she was the divinest thing I had ever seen, and as for her voice, I couldn't find any words for it. It was golden, celestial, something that had come straight from heaven. My sisters sang, but it was nothing like this. I was transported. When she finished she asked me if I

had liked it. I nodded, entirely bereft of words. "Do you know the name of that song?" she asked. I shook my head. "Write it down for him," she commanded, and one of the men did so on the page of a notebook. She tore out the page and gave it to me. "When you grow up," she said, "you can tell people that Albani sang it specially for you." Then she kissed me (oh, rapture!), and I was put back on to the platform, clutching the paper tightly in my hand. A moment or two later the train moved out. I went back into the waiting-room. My people were all asleep, and presently I too became drowsy. When I awoke it was morning. Excitedly I told my sisters about my adventure. "You've been dreaming," they said. Triumphantly I showed them the piece of paper. On it was written, "Ah! fors' è lui," from *La Traviata*. The strange thing about the story is that nobody on the station heard the train come in or depart or heard the singing. But it was Albani, who was touring South Africa, and it remains my most precious memory.

Aug. 5      In to-day's *Express* I write :  
Monday.

How shall I spend bank holiday? Pottering round the garden? Alas! I have no garden, and I do not potter. My staff being away enjoying itself, I shall rise at nine, make myself a cup of tea, and fail to reconstitute the mustard, which I mistake for egg-powder.

I shall then tackle the job of opening and reading the three hundred letters received by me last week in response to my STOP and GO ultimatum. [I had invited readers to send me a single sheet, not a whole manuscript.] Half a minute to decide whether the sender is a genius, an idiot, or something in between. Half a minute to settle his hash one way or the other. Three hundred minutes is five hours, meaning that it is two o'clock and I am peckish.

Since the buses are full I shall not be able to lunch out. Wherefore I mess about with a crust of bread I saved from last week, a bit of cheese nobody has wanted for a long time, and some pineapple jam which has just arrived from South Australia.

After lunch I shall play all my records of Strauss's *Rosenkavalier* and read Wordsworth at the same time. Does somebody think the two don't go together? How about oil and vinegar? I shall, with luck, drop off to sleep for an hour or two. On awakening I shall stagger, on foot, to my favourite grill-room, where I shall get solemnly sozzled, to the extent permitted by my doctor and the price of champagne. I shall listen to the bleating of Bloomsbury, and learn how the world is to be saved by young men with beards, corduroy trousers, and dirty finger nails. I shall nod, and they won't know whether it is approval or sleep.

Round about eleven the body will be carted back to its abode by a Hire Service Company specially retained six weeks ago at a fee of £50, with a £10 tip for the driver.

Well, this is exactly how I have spent to-day. Three hundred letters doesn't sound much, but after a time the mechanical job of opening and returning gets on one's nerves. Still, I wasn't going to say STOP to the author of :

Cousin Dorothy, who is a charmingly conventional person, told me not to be morbid. "Let's go and see the Picasso Exhibition," she said.

Or to the young man who wrote :

I was fourteen when my Aunt started to turn into a horse.

And I sense a feeling for words in :

The unsuccessful scribbler slit his throat decently and daintily.

On the other hand I signalled STOP to a budding poetess who submitted in all seriousness verses entitled *The Love Spasms of Gwendolen*.

Aug. 6      Reviewing Sir Lionel Lindsay's *Addled Art*, I wrote in *Tuesday*.      the *Express* :

Some years ago I, who know nothing about art, and a young friend who knew less, put our heads together and produced the following piece of spoof art criticism :

"Marcel Tirelajambe conveys plasticity not by the laborious modelling of a Raphael, but by the juxtaposition of flat masses of colour, so nicely balanced and so perfectly related as to compel the sensation of recession. In the ideated picture space the planes circulate freely and rhythmically. Here, surely, the superb art of the Kan-kan Negroes of the pre-Jub-jub period finds its consummation."

This was submitted to an art magazine and accepted. I have before me a picture of a young woman sitting on a chair holding a cup to her mouth with her elbow resting on the floor. Can you do it? If you can't, is the picture a joke? No. At least it is not intended to be a joke. This nonsense pervades all the arts. The reason for it? They tell me it is the state of the world. That the soul of the modern painter is so much moved by the fact that the Nazis murdered 12,000,000 Jews that when he draws a man he sees him with ears growing out of his knees and his eyes staring out of the back of his head. This is why a playwright with nothing to say tries to humbug you by making his characters draw off gloves they are not wearing, light pipes they are not smoking, and sit on chairs which are not there. Sir Lionel Lindsay's book magnificently debunks all this modern nonsense—Cubism, Purism, Constructionism, Neoplasticism, Vorticism, Expressionism, and Surrealism. He quotes with devastating effect a sentence from a Surrealist leader who is a combination of Mad Hatter and March Hare : "I demand that you consider anyone an idiot who still refuses to *see* a horse gallop upon a tomato."

To-day I receive this from Alfred Munnings :

*Beldon House  
96 Chelsea Park Gardens, S.W.8*

DEAR MR AGATE,

Nobody could have handled these rascals as you've done. I never read anything approaching it, or half as funny. This morning artists were ringing me up full of it. So was a fellow outside painting the windows. He brought the *Express* in to me. At the races at Epsom lots of my friends had seen it.

You are the only critic who has dared to attack these people.

On behalf of myself and many others I thank you twenty times over.

Yours sincerely,

ALFRED MUNNINGS

Aug. 7            A letter :  
Wednesday.

*Chy-an-Garrack  
St Ives  
Cornwall*

ADMIRABLE MR AGATE,

To-day you have surpassed yourself in debunking the highbrow, in the *Daily Express* and on the radio. Though I admire, sir, your wit and naughty comments on all things highbrow, I do not admire your complete disregard of the good in some of the contemporary artists, poets, and musicians. It is no use condemning *all* modern paintings, poems, or symphonies with one sweeping Agatian gesture. Please be moderate with Matisse, affectionate towards Auden, and bounteous to Bartók.

Below, a poem I wrote with my pen in my cheek, for your secretary's and your delight—mainly for your secretary's. I think it is as praiseworthy as any of the so-called poems which are printed in periodicals with titles like *Fresh Letters* and *Nightlight*.

#### SUCKLE THE BREEZE WINTER

Suckle the breeze winter,  
Fiddle and fold cocoa,  
Put lukewarm in radiance  
And pick the pleased cockroach.  
Like conscious flesh tincture \  
And dank draughty cobwebs  
I- smoky verisimilitude.  
Push the tocsin belling to the fore,  
Wipe the slow oatella round,  
Clavicle the stairs  
And sing a ringing swing sneeze  
To the innocuous nightsickness,  
To smooth the supernacular narcissism.  
O begone fantastic ungual picaroon !

Here's luck to you and your *Ego* biographies !  
Yours impertinently,

PATRICK W. ROWE

P.S. *de résistance*—I have enclosed a stamped and addressed envelope for a reply from you, however brief. I hope it'll be worth 2½d.

*Aug. 8*            Shall have some fun on Sunday apropos of *Fear No Thursday.*    *More* at the Lyric, Hammersmith, a dramatisation by Diana Hamilton and Conrad Aiken of a story by Aiken. This well and truly led me up the highbrow path, the play being nearly over before I realised that what I was seeing was not happening at all, but passing through the mind of a man under an anæsthetic. Shall begin by telling *S.T.* readers of a dream which has obsessed me since the age of nine and dating back to the time when my parents first took me to London. Entering a chemist's shop to inquire the price of a piece of old brocade exhibited in the window, I left my mother sitting on the doorstep. The dignified proprietor bowed and said, "Good morning, young gentleman, I am Mr Hermann Vezin." Abashed, I quitted his counter in haste and stumbled over my mother, who rose and pointed to the street, where I beheld a procession of grooms in Lincoln green, with cockades in their hats, leading a string of white and dappled palfreys. From wallets slung at their sides they took handfuls of gay-coloured butterflies and launched them into the air. "That," said my mother composedly, "is the new way of advertising croquet on the Thames Embankment!" I shall then tell the story of the Hammersmith play and end, "At which point, everybody on the stage took off his rubber gloves and launched them into the auditorium. 'That,' said my great-aunt, who had been sitting on my knee throughout the entire performance without my perceiving it, 'is the new way of advertising greyhound-racing in Trafalgar Square!' The subconscious is a game that two can play at."

*Aug. 9*            Bored G.I. at repertory performance of *The Cherry Friday.*    *Orchard*: "Cripes, if I'd known there was going to be all this fuss about a bloody orchard I'd have bought it myself in the first act."



*Aug. 10* Letter from Jock :  
*Saturday.*

*Spooncreel*  
*Maybole*  
*Ayrshire*

DEAR JAMIE,

I have come home for a week's holiday, and within an hour of my arrival went down, on a glistening summer morning, to the cemetery to see how the engraver had dealt with my father's tombstone. My heart was full of sorrow—and the fear of misprints. I looked first at the quotation at the foot of the stone, fearing the worst, though I had printed the Spenser carefully in a letter full of minute instructions. But there it was, all correct and touching :

Sleep after Toyle, Port after Stormie Seas,  
Ease after Warre, Death after Life does Greatly Please—

archaic spelling and all.

But above it, to my horror, I then saw that the stone had been erected to the memory of JOHN DENT by TESS, JACK, and ALLAN (Allan—not Alan !). What does one do about such things in such circumstances ? Nothing, I suppose.

I am always happy here, where I was born and bred. But this time I'm shocked to see that nearly all my schoolfellows have grey hairs. And so have I !

Ever,  
JOCK

I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR JOCK,

You can't do anything about it. No one can do anything about anything. But it isn't as bad as being an officer of the Crown and winding up a peroration with a passage about the German character which you attribute to Goethe before the event (with a passing compliment to that sage for his prescience), when the passage really belongs to Thomas Mann, writing after the event. I can never quite make out who Gog and Magog were. But I should take their statues down, always presuming they weren't bombed, and put up two to Slipshod and Sloven.

Yours ever,  
JAMIE

*Aug. 12* Letter from Ernest Helme :  
*Monday.*

*Llangennith*  
*Swansea*

DEAR JAMES,

I must trespass on your time to let you know how greatly I enjoyed your devastation of some youth in your best Johnsonian

style over the wireless. I actually burst into frenzied "Hear! Hears" of sympathetic support! You may like to know that your voice came over splendidly; I never heard it more plainly.

I have been confined to my bed for five weeks with a rather serious attack of concussion resulting from a fall down a flight of stone steps *after breakfast* (N.B.), when I struck my right temple against a rock. I was picked up unconscious some thirty minutes later, having lost a considerable amount of blood.

The week before last I was bitten by an adder on the ankle, which has left my right foot very tender. And the third and worst experience was having to open two fêtes this week; one in the village of Llanmadoc, where seventy-two years ago this month I was put on shore from my father's yacht—beastly thing. I hate yachting, and my father had four at different times. Nothing on the sea for me under 20,000 tons, and yachts rarely attain a rating of 200 tons.

I am struck by the number of fine pianists now before the public: Clifford Curzon rendered the final movement of the Emperor Concerto with greater virtuosity than any pianist I have heard since Sophie Menter; to-night also a young Pole, Malcuzyński, in Rachmaninoff No. 3 Pianoforte Concerto, electrified the Albert Hall audience deservedly, and was brought back nine times according to the announcer. In comparison with this the vocalists are not even mediocre; there is not one who would have been allowed to sing in my parents' house after dinner, with the possible exception of Elisabeth Schumann, if she sings what is suitable to her light soprano.

What a damned nuisance the Jews are!

Yours aye,

ERNEST HELME

I replied:

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR DICKY,

Congratulations on your birthday. Bless me, how old we are all getting! I shall be sixty-nine next month. Did you see that Albert Garcia, son of my father's old friend Gustave Garcia, grandson of Manuel Garcia the centenarian, great-nephew of Malibran and Pauline Viardot-Garcia, great-grandson of Manuel Garcia the singer, died this week at the age of seventy-one? Yes, Master Dicky, we cannot choose but be old.

This afternoon I called on C. B. Cochran, who is seventy-four. Told me that a day or two ago he received a letter from the son of Jenny Lind, who regarded his mother as in every way superior to Patti. What do you say? J. L.'s last stage performance was in 1849. She did, however, make occasional appearances up to her death, in 1887, so that it is just possible that you heard her as a very small boy. If you didn't hear her, how would your parents

have compared the two ? In the matter of the son's letter I don't believe that family feeling enters into it at all. Brotherly affection has never interfered with my brother Mycroft's judgment of my work, or with my judgment of May's.

*Est-ce que je voyage, moi ?* as the French station-master said. My doctor has gone to Cannes, my lawyer to Switzerland, Bertie van Thal to Sweden, Charles Smith to Hollywood, Jock to Scotland, George Mathew to Torquay, my understanding chemist to Clacton, my favourite waiter to Hove, and my pet photographer to Blackpool. I badly want to refer to a certain book, unobtainable in the shops, and find the publishers closed for a fortnight. Owing to summer holidays, bank holiday, the gas strike, and the soap and starch shortage I have not had a collar from my laundry for eight weeks. So roll on the Atom Bomb ! Apparently it is rolling all right without any encouragement from me. Here is something from to-night's paper which you may possibly have missed : " Within four years rockets will travel up to 6000 miles and be capable of delivering with considerable accuracy ' a telling tonnage of explosives,' says Maj.-Gen. Curtis May, head of the U.S. Army Air Force Development Staff. It is also possible, he told A. P., that by 1950 there will be jet-propelled aircraft which can carry atomic bombs." Seriously, I am glad this thing has fallen in my time. I should have hated to die without knowing the Supreme Joke of All—that Sentience, all there is of self-awareness in the Cosmos, should destroy itself. I wonder what Dr Johnson, Charles Lamb, and my brother Edward would have found to say about this jape so truly awful and so irresistibly comic.

What a damned nuisance the Russians are !

Ever,

J. A.

*Aug. 18* One evening last week a personable and strangely clean  
*Tuesday.* young man came up to me in the Café Royal and said,  
" Where is Wiltshire ? " I said, " Next county to Hampshire. Why ? " He said, " That's odd ; I thought it was somewhere in the Fen District. The reason I ask is because I've just been posted to the Wiltshire Regiment. [Grunts from J. A.] My name is Peter Forster, Second Lieutenant. It seems that the cradle of civilisation—Egypt, you know—is rocking, and they want me to steady it."

J. A. Who's ' they ' ?

Y. M. The War Office.

J. A. (*waking up*). What the devil has all this to do with me ?

Y. M. Only that I'm going to succeed you on the *Sunday Times*.

J. A. The hell you are ! What are your qualifications ?

Y. M. That I'm a first-class dramatic critic.

J. A. How old are you ?

Y. M. Twenty.

J. A. Then what you mean is, you are a potentially first-class critic.

Y. M. I'm a jolly good writer.

J. A. When do you start for the Middle East ?

Y. M. Wednesday morning next.

J. A. Lunch with me here Tuesday next, and bring with you 8000 words establishing that you are not just a conceited young fool.

Devas Jones arriving at this point, I said, " Let me introduce a young man I don't know to my Commanding Officer in the First World War." Forster said, " I hope I am on speaking terms with my C.O. in thirty years' time. It's more than I am now ! " To-day he turned up on time with an essay of exactly 8000 words entitled *A Very Short View of the English Stage*. I cull :

I have never seen a great actor. Of course I have never seen a great actor. Nobody has since 14th October 1905. But then in these days we set genius at a discount and concentrate on the Lowest Common Denominator. O you reformers ! Is it not enough that a communal hand should rock the child in a communal crèche ; that individual lives should become no more than Vital Statistics ? Would you also take away my gilt and plush ? Would you abolish boxes ? Would you have me sit in some civic shed and listen to solemn tracts about the economic problems of ploughmen in the Caucasus ? And must I consider this good drama because you consider it good politics ? O City Corporation Censor ! Dost thou think because thou art communist there shall be no more Somerset Maughams ? . . .

Ralph Richardson's portrait of the scruffy, frowzy stage of early middle age, the age when for the first time a man doesn't bother to put on a clean collar : that was wonderful acting. And the final realisation that " Vouloir ce que Dieu veut, est la seule science qui nous met en repos," as Vanya and Sonia began work again, was most moving. His Falstaff I thought a wonderful piece of bluff, all brilliant overtones, with every resort of comic technique. a spoiled-baby Falstaff, bigger, brighter, funnier than ever before. He is the least extraordinary of actors in the front rank to-day. His performances are on view, with all credentials in order ; and all of the highest integrity ; " no offence i' the world," he seems to say ; hard-working, self-effacing interpreter of difficult rôles ; his face the face of Everyman—meeting him casually on a bus the last thing you would take him for would be a distinguished actor. . . .

By his Hamlet Gielgud will be best remembered. He played him not like Wolfit, as a private detective watching over the Danish Royal Family ; nor in the Clunes manner, like Young Woodley on the eve of expulsion ; nor yet in the style of Maurice Evans's new version, broadened and abridged for soldiers, as a

Yankee at the Court of King Claudius. With Gielgud it was the ruin of a noble nature. Exquisite in delivery, in action liquid grace, he sustained the excitement and tension right up to the sad heroics of the sword play, until finally the rest was silence, save for the heavy breathing of the dead.

Good enough for twenty years of age. We shook hands on the understanding that he is to save £150 before he comes out of the Army next spring. This will give him £3 a week to starve on for a year, during which time I undertake to find him a job as a fledgling critic.

*Aug. 14*            Reply from Clive Brook to a message I sent him asking  
*Wednesday.*    whether he would play Aubrey Tanqueray if we could find a good Paula. He said, "Tell Mr Agate I am too dull an actor to risk so dull a part." Charming!

*Aug. 15*            "The idea of criticism," said George Saintsbury,  
*Thursday.*

as something positive and positively attainable and ascertainable, once for all—like the quotient of a sum, the conclusion of a syllogism, or the cast of a death-mask—is a mere delusion. Criticism is the result of the reaction of the processes of one mind on the products of another, or, to put it more popularly, it tells us how something looks to or 'strikes' somebody.

Well, how did Jonquil Antony's adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* strike me to-night? Which is only half the question. How am I struck by the novel itself? Am worried about what I shall say on Sunday. I shall have to stoke up my courage, since your Janeites can be savage-wild, more fierce and more inexorable than empty tigers or the roaring sea. I am no more than half a Janeite. I care nothing which Jack gets which Jill; as far as I am concerned Elizabeth Bennet can make a match with Knightley and Emma hit it off with Mr Collins. This perversity, blind spot, hoggish stupidity, makes me a wholly unreliable critic of any play made out of an Austen novel. That long speech between Willoughby and Elinor? Well, I just don't see Pinero, Sudermann, Sardou, having their big third act with Paula, Magda, La Tosca upstairs in bed with a temperature. The play was still going on after three hours and a quarter, when I left. The acting? I remember nothing except Marie Löhr's second-act headdress, a turban'd monstrosity which Kean might have worn in *Oroonoko*.

*Aug. 16* Letter from George Richards informing me that his new  
*Friday.* Siamese kitten, Mount Pleasant Agate, is by Wansfell  
 Ajax by Job Bangkok, out of Mount Pleasant Bluebell,  
 whose sire and dam were called Fontmell Ali and Toddy Twinkletoes.  
 The letter goes on :

Recently, during the interval of a concert held in a bleak, dilapidated, and spectral town-hall ballroom, I began to explore the dingy passages leading to the dens of the drivers of municipal pens, and all of a sudden found myself face to face—with the recitalist. On the platform : *Quelle belle tête!* And here before me stood merely an amiable, rather ordinary, egg-faced Jew. I came away from the unsought encounter wondering whence and what is the spark innate in the artist.

And ends :

My undeniable poetic talents are evidenced by the fact that never a day passes without at least *one* line of pure serenest poetry coming unbidden into my head. Two days ago I swore a holy oath never to permit in future a single one of these gems to pass unrecorded into Oblivion's Great Abyss. Here, then, is the first fruits of this resolution so momentous for the future of English poetry. The title I have chosen after much thought is

BEN NEVIS

Sandy reed-patches mildewed snow  
 There on the solemn summit  
 In a tiny hat stuttering muttering  
 Rock-bellied nonsense  
 Sit  
 Two dentists

No punctuation, please.

*Aug. 17* British Paramount News came along to Grape Street  
*Saturday.* with a demand that I should talk next week for two minutes about H. G. Wells. People going out and coming in. Of that part of the audience which is not on the move half have never heard of H. G., while the other half have not heard of me. However, I do my best, which isn't easy with a small furnace blazing away at my left ear, a dangling mike, and the place festooned with rubber piping as though Jack the Ripper had been at work. I am not really a Wellsian. H. G. wanted to be more than an artist, and I could never see why the great novelist, the master of the Shape of Things as they Are, should bother about the Shape of Things to Come. However, I keep quiet about this and quote my favourite passage from *Mr Polly*, the bit about "sufficient beauty."

*Aug. 19 Monday.* Have been reading John Dover Wilson's new edition of *King Henry IV, Parts I and II*, and find him a little less than sound on a point that is, to me, of intense interest—the real character of Prince Hal :

If Hal be the cad and hypocrite that many modern readers imagine, or even if he seem merely "dimly wrought" by the side of his gross friend, then the whole grand scheme of the Lancastrian cycle miscarries, since it is the person and reign of King Henry V which gives the bright centre to that dark picture, a brightness that by contrast makes the chaos that follows all the more ghastly.

"Tellest thou me of 'ifs'?" In all English literature I do not know a more revolting passage than that in Part I, Act I, Scene 2, beginning: "Yet herein will I imitate the sun." The gorge of Pecksniff himself must have risen at the hypocrisy of :

And like bright metal on a sullen ground,  
My reformation, glittering o'er my fault,  
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes  
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.  
I'll so offend, to make offence a skill;  
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

Quiller-Couch said that this speech, if we accept it, poisons all of Harry that follows :

Most of us can forgive youth, hot blood, riot: but a prig of a rake, rioting on a calculated scale, confessing that he does it coldly, intellectually, and that he proposes to desert his comrades at the right moment to better his own repute—that kind of rake surely all honest men abhor.

("Q," whom this greatly bothered, tried to throw the responsibility upon Burbage, who, he half-heartedly suggested, came to the poet and said at a later date: "Look here, the audience aren't going to stand for a rascalion turned Sunday-school teacher. You've got to get them right about him in the beginning!" Whereupon Shakespeare went back and obediently inserted the miserable stuff.) The Professor says: "The anointed king who emerges from the Abbey is a different *man* from the prince who entered." Who, then, is right? "Q," who condemned the anointed Henry as a cad, or J. D. W., who talks of spiritual change?

When literary critics differ, who shall decide? Obviously, a dramatic critic. In his earlier book *The Fortunes of Falstaff* J. D. W. put forward the theory that Shakespeare intended Falstaff to appear in *Henry V*, thus fulfilling the promise in the Epilogue to *Henry IV*. That Shakespeare made this promise in the belief that Kempe would be there to play Falstaff, and that, Kempe having left the company

and no other Falstaff forthcoming, Shakespeare had to kill off the big fellow. I'm sorry, but I don't believe a word of it. I prefer "Q" 's manly, direct :

Shakespeare could not bring Falstaff upon the stage in *King Henry V*, because he dared not. . . . Henry must not be allowed to meet Falstaff. For Falstaff can kill him with a look. . . . It was Henry who wronged Falstaff and killed his heart ; Falstaff had never a thought of hurting Henry : and therefore, or ever you can present Henry of Agincourt as your *beau idéal* of a warrior king, you must kill Falstaff somehow and get his poor old body behind the arras : for, as Hazlitt said, he is the better man of the two.

Let me put it that J. D. W. is right in the study, and "Q" a hundred times right on the stage.

*Aug. 21* Letter from George Jean Nathan thanking me for *Wednesday. Around Cinemas*, telling me that the drawing of Lillian Gish which I used as frontispiece is by Tilly Losch, and making this highly Nathanish confession : "My interest in the cinema has lapsed since women began to talk."

*Aug. 22* Am making one last effort to drive into the heads of *Thursday. Express* readers that writing is an art. Nobody expects to be a county cricketer, League footballer, ballet dancer, without special aptitude. People recognise that you have to be an engineer before you can put a motor-car together, an architect before you can build a cathedral, an actor before you can play Hamlet. What most people fail to realise is that *you have to be a writer before you can write*. Let me deal with the last three letters in this morning's STOP and GO mail. The first offers a poem entitled *Boyhood*. This begins :

Of noblest form, a boy's mould,  
His eye so clear and blue,  
His chestnut hair with ev'ry fold,  
Entrances all but few.

A young woman whose ear does not tell her what is wrong with the first line, and whose sense of humour lets her write the fourth line, is not going to be a poetess if she lives to three times the age of Methuselah.

The second letter offers another poem. This is called *Wild Symphony*. It ends :

But most of all I love to hear  
That lovely voice of you, my dear,  
The way you speak, the way you sing,  
The way you let your laughter ring,  
The way you softly lullaby  
To soothe a pain ; to still a cry.



Will intending poets please realise that liking some young woman has nothing to do with the ability to write a sonnet to her eyebrow ? That it is easier for a poet to write a convincing sonnet to a woman he loathes than for a non-poet to write anything but drivel to a woman he adores.

The author of the third letter is nearer the mark :

After the children are in bed I hammer out, on an antiquated typewriter, articles on How to do This or That. In this way I earn several useful shillings, so naturally I shall continue to sell my quite worthless advice on every possible subject. But at the back of my mind there lives a group of people who only move and talk when I am alone ironing, or darning, or washing up the supper things. Some day I am going to write their story, but it will be the story of ordinary decent folk, living eventful but unspectacular lives. In other words, a novel which will be unutterably dull *unless I happen to possess the all-important talent.*

At last somebody who realises that to write well requires at least as much aptitude and practice as to cut out an appendix, walk a tight-rope, or stand up for ten seconds against Joe Louis ! In other words, writing is a conjuring trick, and the only person who can perform conjuring tricks is a conjurer.

Aug. 23 Letter from my little Irish friend :  
Friday.

18 Park View Avenue  
Harold's Cross  
Dublin

DEAR JAMES,

My friend Miss Wood has written me of her visit to your flat :

"A little before noon a near-petrified young person crept up the stairs at Queen Alexandra Mansions and rang the bell with trembling hand. There was a short silence, then a discreet fluttering among some long curtains which could be glimpsed through the frosted-glass door. A hurried conference inside, then the door was opened by a quiet, shy, very gentle young man in a dark suit, and wearing an oddly tired, peaceful look. . . . At the end of the dark hall there hovers for an instant a Vision, some Sage of the Lower Ganges, wrapped in many a billowy shirt (none of which covers its dainty ankles), white hair standing straight up, large horn-rimmed spectacles terrifyingly directed towards me. The Vision disappears."

Mr Agate says will the boy please write to him. The boy would be very pleased to spend his nights and days writing to Mr A., if Mr A. ever replied. Indeed, the boy's admiration for Mr A. has

been revived by hearing him broadcast two or three times of late. The boy agrees that no poet living can write as Tennyson did *at his best*. The boy agrees that all modern composers, except Sibelius, can't hold a match to Beethoven, or for that matter poor, dear, unappreciated Haydn. The boy would give all modern music—always with the glorious, soul-ravishing exception of that tremendous genius Sibelius—for Beethoven's Violin Concerto, or, indeed Tchaikowsky's Symphony No. 5. (However much people sneer at T., the fact remains that his melodies are still lovely and infinitely better than anything done by contemporary composers.) The boy would give all books published by intellectuals to-day for one volume of Dickens or Jane. (He likes, however, Kate O'Brien and Elizabeth Bowen, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Seán O'Faoláin, and one or two others.) The boy still likes Mr A. better than any other critic, despite his lapses into nonsense, his jaundiced eye, his bourgeois complacency, and his rather boring vulgarity.

The boy signs himself Mr Agate's devoted servant,

J. E. JORDAN

Aug. 24 I don't suppose there are six people left in England  
Saturday. who would be interested in Lysiane Bernhardt's new  
life of her grandmother. Wherefore I shall keep my  
interest to myself. Lysiane gives at the end Sarah's contribution to  
Diderot's famous Paradox :

On croit généralement dans le public que les comédiens lâchent leurs rôles après dix ou quinze représentations. Je les vis absolument. Sophie Croizette, après la scène d'empoisonnement dans *Le Sphinx*, restait quelques minutes pâle et claquant des dents ; parfois, elle perdait connaissance et cela, pendant les cent représentations. Le tragédien Beauvallet pleurait tous les soirs à chaudes larmes dans la scène de la forêt (*le roi Lear*). Mounet Sully était parfois réellement halluciné dans les fureurs d'Oreste. Morain avait de tels battements de cœur dans le quatrième acte de *La Dame aux Camélias* que souvent il ne pouvait plus parler, et, durant les cent cinquante représentations de *Fédora*, j'ai cru cent cinquante fois que ma dernière minute était arrivée. Ipanoff, aveuglé par la colère, m'étranglait plus sérieusement que Pierre Berton ne l'eût voulu. Enfin je n'ai jamais joué *Phèdre* sans m'émouvoir ou cracher le sang ; après le quatrième tableau de *Théodora*, dans lequel je tue Marcellus, je suis dans un tel état nerveux que je remonte en sanglotant dans ma loge. Si je ne pleure pas, j'ai une crise nerveuse beaucoup plus désagréable pour ceux qui m'entourent et dangereuse pour les objets.

Well, Sarah wrote that and presumably meant it, though I don't see how she would square it with the fact that often before the last

act of *La Dame aux Camélias* she would jump into bed with a ravishing smile, saying, "Allons mourir !" I fail to see how an actor, having gone pretendedly mad, and feeling it, every night during a run of *King Lear*, could fail to go mad in earnest. I suspect the truth to be that the actor who thinks he feels his part is feeling some 90 per cent. of it, and that it is the 10 per cent. margin which enables him to go on committing suicide, slaying, and being slain. That if it were not for this margin our Romeos would die of grief and our Othellos of remorse, while our Lears would all be put into asylums.

*Aug. 25* Always when human imbecility becomes too much for me  
*Sunday.* I turn to the stories of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. This afternoon I rang up the Duty Officer at the B.B.C. and demanded that on behalf of the *Radio Times* the announcer of this afternoon's programme should apologise for printing the title of Poulenc's little piece as "Mouvements Perpétuelles" (*sic*). After which I took down the *Contes Cruels* and read *Le Secret de l'Ancienne Musique*. A German work was to be produced at the Paris Opera House ; la France ne saurait prendre sur elle de tronquer, par une exécution défectueuse, la pensée d'un compositeur à quelque nation qu'il appartienne. But there figured in the score an instrument known as *le Chapeau chinois*, fallen, alas ! into desuetude. Consternation ! And then Cymbals bethought him of an ancient professor of the forgotten instrument. To seek him out, to climb his nine flights of stairs, to implore his co-operation, was the work of a second. Dans les angles s'ébauchaient de vieux Chapeaux chinois ; ça et là gisaient plusieurs albums dont les titres commandaient l'attention. C'était d'abord : *Un premier amour !* mélodie pour Chapeau chinois seul, suivie de *Variations brillantes sur le Choral de Luther*, concerto pour trois Chapeaux chinois. Puis septuor de Chapeaux chinois (grand unisson) intitulé : *Le Calme*. Puis une œuvre de jeunesse (un peu entachée de romantisme) : *Danse nocturne de jeunes Mauresques dans la campagne de Grenade, au plus fort de l'Inquisition* (grand boléro pour Chapeau chinois) ; enfin, l'œuvre capitale du maître : *Le Soir d'un beau jour*, ouverture pour cent cinquante Chapeaux chinois.

Cymbals spoke up on behalf of the National Academy. The old musician bowed his head. "Mon pays avant tout." Il leur tendait ses mains pâles, rompues aux difficultés d'un instrument ingrat. But mark what follows : Le maître allemand, par une jalousie tudesque, s'était complu, avec une âpreté germane, une malignité rancunière, à hérissier la partie du Chapeau chinois de difficultés presque insur-

montables ! Elles s'y succédaient, pressées ! ingénieuses ! soudaines. C'était un défi ! Qu'on juge : cette partie ne se composait, exclusivement, que de *silences*. Or, même pour les personnes qui ne sont pas du métier, qu'y a-t-il de plus difficile à exécuter que le *silence* pour le Chapeau chinois ? . . . Et c'était un CRESCENDO de silences que devait exécuter le vieil artiste !

Did the master go down in defeat ? Nenni ! The old player bent all his energies to his task. Il joua. Sans broncher ! Avec une maîtrise, une sureté, un *brio*, qui frappèrent d'admiration tout l'orchestre. Son exécution, toujours sobre, mais pleine de nuances, était d'un style si châtié, d'un rendu si pur, que, chose étrange ! il semblait, par moments, *qu'on l'entendait* ! The dedication of the story ? " A Monsieur Richard Wagner."

*Aug. 26 Monday.* What do I remember about Marie Bashkirtseff ? I was eleven years old when the Diary was first published, but I was alive to the extraordinary stir it made. That " noble foghorn " Mr Gladstone gave tongue about it. And I wasn't allowed to read it. The world into which this Russian child was born was a world in which wasp-waisted women must either sit bolt upright or recline at full length. It was into this hingeless world, this museum, that this astonishing little combustion engine was born. She was bored by her family, and put down the fact in her Diary. She admired the size of her own hips and put that down also. She came to Paris and fell violently and hopelessly in love with the Duke of Hamilton, of whose mistress she publicly proclaimed her envy. With the politician Cassagnac. With an Italian count. With a French steeplechase-rider whose neck she wished broken rather than that he should marry any other woman.

Yes, I have always collected scraps of information about Marie. She was a *nymphomane de tête*, if there is such an expression. Unless I'm greatly mistaken her love affairs were all in her head. What interests me most about her is her colossal egotism—greater than mine and Napoleon's put together. If God would give her fame as a painter she would " go to Jerusalem and do a tenth of the journey on foot." Well, she was a goodish painter. But she realised that she was not going to live long enough to win immortality by her brush. What else had she ? Only the Diary, begun at the age of twelve. And then she started a campaign which makes me boggle. Boggle because of the extraordinary mixture of splendid audacity and unbelievable lack of tact. The idea at the back of Marie's mind

was to get some celebrity to publish, edit, or lend his name to her Diary. She invited Dumas  *fils*  to meet her, and, receiving a reply from the great man saying that novel-reading had gone to her head and advising her to go to bed early, sent him back a snorter: "Sleep well yourself, Monsieur, and continue to be as  *bourgeois*  in small matters as you are an artist in great." Next she tackled Edmond de Goncourt, who had used her as model for his novel  *Chérie* , which has been on my shelf for forty years. This begins with a dinner party given by Chérie, aged nine, to little friends some six and seven years old:

L'amusant spectacle que la réunion autour de la table de ces petites Parisiennes, au minois futé, aux yeux éveillés de souris, à l'intelligence hâtive de la physionomie, à l'enfance menue, distinguée, raffinée, quintessenciée de l'enfant des capitales et des salons, gracieux petits êtres dont la pâleur intéressante avait été enjolivée par les mères avec tout le goût possible, bouts de femmes déjà montrés en les galants arrangements que la mode fashionable crée pour les petites filles des riches!

To return to Marie and her letter to Goncourt. This begins: "Monsieur, like every one else, I have read  *Chérie* , and, between ourselves, it is full of platitudes." Naturally Goncourt did not answer. She wrote to Zola, and ended her letter: "I don't suppose you will answer this: I am told that in actual life you are a complete  *bourgeois* ." No answer from Zola. But her most formidable attack was made on Maupassant, with whom she exchanged half a dozen letters, all of which are to be read in Dormer Creston's  *Fountains of Youth* . But all Marie's efforts were unavailing, Maupassant wittily but firmly declining to meet her.

The concernancy? Only that this afternoon at the Carlton Cinema in Tottenham Court Road I saw a film entitled  *Marie Bashkirtseff* , and described as "freely adapted from passages in the Journal." Half the picture is about Marie having her money stolen by a gang of thieves, and learning to roller-skate. The other half shows her and Maupassant in the throes of mutual passion, meeting surreptitiously in crowded  *salons*  and by moonlight. How, learning that her time is short, and wishing to spare the dramatist pain, she tells him that she has never loved him, and has merely used him as part of her scheme for winning the Academy's gold medal. Whereupon Maupassant goes and gets the gold medal and presents it to her on her deathbed. And Marie, opening her eyes for the last time, says, "Glory and Fame are nothing so long as I have you!" How came the authors not to

realise that the real woman and her real life are a thousand times more interesting than this tepid twaddle ? Hear Dormer Creston :

The interior of the Russian church in the Rue Daru was illuminated as if to receive a monarch, and along the streets there slowly drew towards it a funeral procession. Bright autumn sunshine fell on the massed-up wreaths, on the six white horses, on their housings of silver. On the white velvet that covered the coffin itself had been laid one green palm leaf. All this emphasis of a young death, the white horses, their silver trappings, the palm leaf, the folds of white velvet, would have responded exactly to what Marie, with her romantic self-idealisation, would have considered appropriate. In all probability she had herself arranged these details. . . .

When will the makers of films realise that the truth about historical figures—and M. B. is an historical figure—is more exciting than any romantic fiction ? How much better a film of this utterly purposed chit, gloomily, savagely bent on immortality, throwing herself in her short twenty-four years at the heads of everybody likely to help her, unendingly snubbed, *and ending by getting what she wanted !*

*Aug. 27* In a letter from the mother of the Arnhem boy :  
*Tuesday.*

I thought maybe you would be interested to hear that my husband, myself, and little family have just enjoyed a week's holiday at the seaside out of the prize money. It is the first time the kiddies had seen the sea, and only the second holiday my husband and myself have had in our 25 years of married life, so I think my son would be very pleased we had used it so. Also, my husband and myself go to Arnhem with members of 1st Airborne Div. on Sept. 15th. This again would have been out of the question.

*Aug. 28* The new film, *London Town*, at the Leicester Square  
*Wednesday.* Theatre, is an extravaganza put together to hold the best five bits out of Sid Field's music-hall performance—the Cockney, the Musician, the Photographer, the Golfer, and the Man about Town. (Appalling when it's about anything else.) Field is in the great tradition. He cannot put hand, foot, eyebrow, or tongue-tip wrong, is immensely and unendingly funny, and as a great comedian he cannot escape the law which insists that performers in this kind shall be known for something outside their comedy. With Leno it was swell of soul, with Grock it is logic, and with Charlie Chaplin pathos. Field has a quality I have not seen on the stage since Hawtrey, of whom Henry Maxwell wrote :

Whoever—man, woman, or child—has *pouted* to such effect as Hawtrey ? He would pout to indicate a certain type of displeasure.

Babies are often given to it, but Hawtrey—contriving to look more like a baby than any infant in its cradle—could yet impart something additional, piquant and pertinent ; he could impart to it just that element of pathos which it is the rare achievement of the lovable to command, even when they are being as difficult as only the lovable know how to be.

Sid Field is always a great baby, and never more than when he is being, as he thinks, sophisticated.

P.S. Fame at last ! My waiter at the Café Royal said, “ I saw you last night on the News Reel. You was very good.” I said, “ Where was I very good ? ” He said, “ At the Classic, Balham ! ”

Aug. 29            *The Windmill* having asked me for An Alphabet of  
Thursday.        Literary Prejudice, I append an

## INTAGLIO

*ASYLUM.* From the *Broadmoor Chronicle* for June 1946 :

“ What are our prospects for the cricket season ? There are a number of new players who, if they practise and listen to the good advice from the staff members who will take them in hand down at nets, will prove to be an asset. F. E. and W. G. P. are shaping well.”

Suggested advertisement : “ Wanted change bowler and fourth at bridge. Cut-throat not objected to.”

*BATOUALA.* Balzac, Berlioz, Bernhardt—everything I have liked best in life has begun with a B, including the part-author of Shakespeare’s plays. Nevertheless I choose this book by René Maran, who claimed that it was a “ véritable roman nègre.” “ Une fois qu’il se fut frotté les yeux du revers de la main et mouché des doigts, il se leva en se grattant. Il se gratta sous les aisselles. Il se gratta les cuisses, la tête, les fesses, les bras. Se gratter est un exercice excellent. Il active la circulation du sang. C’est aussi un plaisir et un indice. On n’a qu’à regarder autour de soi. Tous les êtres animés se grattent, au sortir du sommeil. L’exemple est bon à suivre, puisque naturel. Est mal réveillé qui ne se gratte pas. Mais si se gratter est bien, bâiller vaut mieux. C’est une façon de chasser le sommeil par la bouche.”

This seems to me to be nearer the real thing than van Vechten’s gigolo burying his crimped hair in Harlem’s most opulent bosom.

“ ‘ Coty ? ’ he queried.

‘ No. Body,’ she lisped.”

*CORTEZ.* “ Silent, upon a peak in Darien.’ But of course. He was stout and out of breath. On the other hand Vasco da

Gama, according to Meyerbeer, was excessively vocal in similar circumstances.

**DRAMATIC CRITICISM.** Yes, I know most of the show-pieces by the big-wigs. But the lesser wigs have done well too. Here is Allan Monkhouse in the early years of this century :

“ Mr Benson’s *Coriolanus* strikes one as a splendid rough sketch. It is immensely spirited, and if he bellows like a bull, it is one of Mr Meredith’s

Bulls that walk the pastures with kingly-flashing coats.

His movements tell more than his words, but Mr Benson makes the queer paradox of an imaginative actor who is careless of words.”

“ Happily *Love’s Labour’s Lost* has an essential sanity, though its surface is so riotous. The year’s probation for the gay young people is an artful corrective to the cloying feast. To the audience unstinting praise may be given. When the play grew very dull and no ingenuities of the actors could save us from what might have been critical moments, there was no impatience, but only the nervous attention of agitated friends. We all breathed freely again when Mr Benson turned a somersault or made some other exhilarating diversion.”

“ Even in a jocular play we expect the dramatist to steady himself occasionally and say something about the Union Jack or the sanctity of home, and this austerity of art that never trifles with morals or realities, except in the sense that it is all trifling, is almost disturbing to respectable citizens. It is a little bewildering, too, to find that nothing is happening, for nothing of importance does happen, and Importance surely must have been to Wilde a word of purely comic significance.”

*ERCLES’ VEIN.* M’yes.

. . . roasted in wrath and fire,  
And thus o’er-sized with coagulate gore,  
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus  
Old grandsire Priam seeks.

I fancy that Hamlet should speak this with good accent and good discretion, but that

And never did the Cyclops’ hammers fall  
On Mars’s armour, forged for proof eterne,  
With less remorse than Pyrrhus’ bleeding sword  
Now falls on Priam.

should be mouthed out of all reason by First Player, and that Hamlet has this in mind in his remarks about the robustious periwig-pated fellow who insists on tearing a passion to tatters.



**FRANCE.** Yes, but what part ? I choose Arles.

“ Arles has no misgivings on the score of pedigree ; her line comes down unbroken. The historian will tell you that through Arles Hannibal’s Numidians marched to the sack of Italy, that within her walls a Roman Emperor had his palace, that during the governorship of Decimus Junius Brutus, a Greek designed and built the exquisite theatre, still to be seen. He will go on to tell you of the Amphitheatre, of the thickness of its walls, its diameter, its seating capacity. He will compare you the Coliseum at Rome. He will reconstruct you the Vénus d’Arles, and discuss whether she may not be a reproduction of the lost Aphrodite of Praxiteles. If your historian have imagination he will tell you of the seas of blood that have flowed within the walls of the arena and of horrors that belong more properly to the nightmare pages of a Huysmans than to sober history. If he have sentimental leanings, he will talk of Petrarch and Laura, Aucassin and Nicolette, and others of the world’s famous lovers. Then will he grow lyrical over the famed Arlésienne beauty, and rhapsodical over the inability of alien blood to debase its coinage. ‘ At Marseilles the Phocœans may have planted their arsenals, founded their markets, trained their sailors. But at Arles they loved and bred. Here was the bosom upon which the weary seafarer reposed, and here paid back to posterity the debt he owed the woman of his choice.’ ”

Baedeker ? No, Agate. First book, written during the First World War.

**GAFFES.** The greatest in my experience is George Moore’s in *Impressions and Opinions*, the essay on Rimbaud and Laforgue.

“ But Verlaine’s hour of grace had not yet come, and he sought to dissuade the young disciple from his resolve to abandon the vain glory of art, and consecrate his life to the redemption of his soul. But Rimbaud closed his eyes and ears to allurements and temptations, bade Verlaine farewell, and left Europe to immure himself for ever in a Christian convent on the shores of the Red Sea ; and where it stands on a rocky promontory, he has been seen digging the soil for the grace of God.”

The facts ? Destroyed as many of his manuscripts as he could lay hands on, tramped half over Europe and entered the French Colonial Army, disembarking at Batavia. Deserted after three weeks. Spent eighteen years in North-east Africa, trading in incense and ivory, ostrich plumes and coffee. Achieved a turnover of three million francs a year and made a moderate fortune. Contracted synovitis during mad gallops among the African hills, neglected it, had a leg amputated, and died at Marseilles on November 10, 1891, denying he had ever been a poet.

Question for moralists : If Verlaine had never met the ugly boy

with the " huge red hands like a washerwoman's " would he have made a more exquisite thing of " Pensionnaires " in *Parallèlement* ?

L'une avait quinze ans, l'autre en avait seize ;  
Toutes deux dormaient dans la même chambre.  
C'était par un soir très lourd de septembre :  
Frêles, des yeux bleus, des rougeurs de fraise,

Chacune a quitté, pour se mettre à l'aise,  
La fine chemise au frais parfum d'ambre.  
La plus jeune étend les bras, et se cambre,  
Et sa sœur, les mains sur ses seins, la baise,

Puis tombe à genoux, puis devient farouche  
Et tumultueuse et folle, et sa bouche  
Plonge sous l'or blond, dans les ombres grises ;

Et l'enfant, pendant ce temps-là, recense  
Sur ses doigts mignons des valse promises,  
Et, rose, sourit avec innocence.

*HERMANT*, Abel. For his brilliant novel in the form of a play—*La Fameuse Comédienne*. A young man is addressing his mother :

*LUCIEN*. Maman . . . j'en ai assez ! . . . Elles sont toutes après moi. Ça m'a paru drôle jusqu'à dix-sept ans. Et j'en ai vingt-cinq ! Calcule . . . Tiens, la dernière fois que ça m'a paru drôle, c'est quand M. Bellême, pour se venger de don Ramire, s'est fait homme à bonnes fortunes et m'a soufflé Bibiche Morgan. Toi, tu te moquais qu'il te trompe ; mais, avec la maîtresse de ton fils, tu n'as pas avalé ça. Alors, tu as divorcé. Tu ne saurais croire comme j'étais fier d'occasionner un divorce . . . surtout le tien . . . Mais ces puérilités ne m'amuse plus . . . Je suis dans les tabacs, maman ! Ça ne m'embête pas d'être beau . . . Je regretterais de me faire horreur . . . Mais je voudrais bien qu'on me f . . . la paix . . . Maman . . . je veux me marier . . . en province . . . avec une jeune fille . . . qui est folle de moi, naturellement, et moi je sens que je l'aimerai un jour. Les parents ont des idées moins larges que moi . . . Alors, ils demandent que tu régularises ta situation.

To think that this was written before the clever young men of the modern English theatre had stopped sucking their thumbs.

*INQUISITION*. It was not long after I had stopped sucking the Agate thumb that I came across Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* sandwiched in the family bookcase between *Don Juan* and *Zimmermann on Solitude*. I was strictly forbidden to read or look at the pictures, and of course did both. I thought the latter woefully

lacking in imagination. I remember rewriting a nursery rhyme so that it ran

Froggie would a-flogging go.

And I thought I was the world's only flagellant. Which distressed me until, somewhere, somehow, at the age of sixteen I tumbled across a copy of Somebody's *The Rodiad*, ending as far as I remember

Say what you will, when other joys are past  
Flog and be flogged—'tis no bad end at last.

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J. My two favourite words—*jonquil* and *jadis*. What a title for a novel. *Jonquil and Jadis*.

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KAFKA. Am thinking of starting a movement to be called "Kafka Is Balls," with a club of which I propose to make myself Perpetual President. Not on the strength of having read Kafka—indeed, I have never opened him—but because of what the high-brow magazines tell me about him. Am considering a button with the letters P.P.K.I.B.C. Perpetual President Kafka Is Balls Club.

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LOVENJOUL. Gosse (blast him for a snob!) once said that every book-lover had a Lovenjoul on his shelves. Meaning that he was annoyed to find his copy wasn't unique. Meaning that he didn't want anybody else to know Albéric Second's piquant skit published in *Le Constitutionnel* in 1852—Balzac died in 1850—in which the characters in the *Comédie* come to life.

"Je me sentis pris d'un vif désir d'examiner de près cette artificieuse blonde qui fut tant aimée par le jeune baron Calyste du Guénic (voir *Béatrix*) et j'eus recours au binocle de M. de Rastignac. Madame de Rochegude, devenue osseuse et filandreuse, maigrie, flétrie, les yeux fermés, avait fleuri ses ruines prématurées par les conceptions les plus ingénieuses de l'article-Paris. Comme le soir mémorable où Calyste, marié à mademoiselle de Grandlieu, la retrouva au théâtre des Variétés, sa chevelure blonde enveloppait sa figure allongée par des flots de boucles où ruisselaient les clartés de la rampe, attirées par le luisant d'une huile parfumée. Son front pâle étincelait; elle avait mis du rouge dont l'éclat trompait l'œil sur la blancheur fade de son teint refait à l'eau de son. Une écharpe de soie était tortillée autour de son cou, de manière à en diminuer la longueur. Sa taille était un chef-d'œuvre de composition. Ses bras maigres, durcis, paraissaient à peine sous les bouffants à effets calculés et ses larges manches. Elle offrait ce mélange de lueurs et de soieries brillantes, de gaze et de cheveux crépés, de vivacité, de calme et de mouvement qu'on a nommé le *je ne sais quoi*. Conti fut aussi de ma part l'objet d'un minutieux

examen. Conti avait l'air maussade, distrait, ennuyé, il semblait méditer l'éternelle vérité de cet aphorisme profond et sombre comme un gouffre : ' Il en est des femmes abandonnées comme des cigares éteints ; il ne faut ni reprendre les unes ni rallumer les autres.' "

**MAGRE**, Maurice. Wrote *La Tristesse du Nain Chinois*, the story of a Chinese dwarf who refused to dance for his Western hirers.

Le fouet tourbillonna sur le nain impassible.  
Les mirlitons criaient et claquaient les drapeaux.  
Dans sa face immobile ainsi qu'en une cible  
La patronne planta son épingle à chapeau.

Et le lutteur vint lui donner la bastonnade,  
Et la foire chanta son plaisir, ses amours. . . .  
Toujours le nain voyait parmi le bleu des jades  
Un Bouddha souriant au fond du demi-jour. . . .

**N.** A miserable letter. Nullity and Negation. No English writers except Nash, Newman, and Newton. " No foreign writers except Charles Nodier and that ass Nietzsche. No composers except Nicolai. No painters that I can think of. A world of nincom-poopery, neurasthenics, and necrophilism. Even so, the two great characters in history that I should like to have been belong to the " N " category—Nero and Nebuchadnezzar.

**O.** The sunflower of the alphabet. The usherer-in of some of the handsomest words in the language. Orchidaceous. Orgulous. Orgiastic. Orgasm. O is an organ with all the stops out, where I is a piddling little vowel which makes a noise like a hollyhock in a night breeze.

**PARIS.** " Et moi, couché dans l'herbe, malade de nostalgie, je crois voir, au bruit du tambour qui s'éloigne, tout mon Paris défilér entre les pins. . . . Ah ! Paris ! . . . Paris ! . . . Toujours, Paris ! " **ALPHONSE DAUDET**, *Lettres de mon Moulin*.

**QUOTATION.** My favourite passage in fiction :

" Tiens ! voilà Satin, murmura Fauchery en l'apercevant.

La Faloise le questionna. Oh ! une rouleuse du boulevard, rien du tout. Mais elle était si voyou, qu'on s'amusait à la faire causer. Et le journaliste, haussant la voix :

Que fais-tu donc là, Satin ?

Je m'emmerde, répondit Satin tranquillement, sans bouger.

Les quatre hommes, charmés, se mirent à rire."

**ÉMILE ZOLA**, *Nana*

**RUSKIN.**

"There is a mean wonder, as of a child who sees a juggler tossing golden balls; and this is base, if you will. But do you think that the wonder is ignoble, or the sensation less, with which every human soul is called to watch the golden balls of heaven tossed through the night by the Hand that made them? There is a mean curiosity, as of a child opening a forbidden door, or a servant prying into her master's business;—and a noble curiosity, questioning, in the front of danger, the source of the great river beyond the sand,—the place of the great continents beyond the sea;—a nobler curiosity still, which questions of the source of the River of Life, and of the space of the Continent of Heaven,—things which the angels desire to look into. So the anxiety is ignoble, with which you linger over the course and catastrophe of an idle tale; but do you think the anxiety is less, or greater, with which you watch, or *ought* to watch, the dealings of fate and destiny with the life of an agonized nation? Alas! it is the narrowness, selfishness, minuteness, of your sensation that you have to deplore in England at this day;—sensation which spends itself in bouquets and speeches: in revellings and junketings; in sham fights and gay puppet shows, while you can look on and see noble nations murdered, man by man, without an effort or a tear."

*Sesame and Lilies*

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**STANYHURST'S, ALL NIGHT AT MR.** I have never been able to get anybody to read this except my houseboy, who read it once, and Max Beerbohm, who read it twice.

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**THESE I HAVE LOVED.** With acknowledgments to Rupert Brooke for his "comfortable smell of friendly fingers." Stale aroma of Chelsea pensioners. Odour of warm, moist wicket-keeping gloves. New-laid straw in show-yards and the droppings thereon. Stale of horses. Fragrance of old ladies. Garlic-laden waftage of Provençal peasants. The ringside spume of boxers. Flit. The aftermath of asparagus.

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**UDALL.** I remember a professor of drama reading *Ralph Roister Doister* through inch-thick glasses during the intervals of John Gielgud's *Old Vic Lear*. During the play he held a Temple Shakespeare three inches from his nose, and followed the text through the same glasses. He did not see any actor at any time. I know because I sat immediately behind him.

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**V.** Ernest Dowson told Arthur Symonds that his favourite line of verse was Poe's

The viol, the violet, and the vine.

**W.** It is not generally known that in its original form *The Importance of Being Earnest* had four acts. There are four in Teschenberg's German translation. The scene which was cut concerns Algernon and a warrant for his arrest in connection with an unpaid bill of £762 14s. 2d. for suppers consumed at the Savoy Hotel. There are some admirable lines. "Late supper is the only meal the dear fellow's doctor allows him." I like best the lawyer's "Time presses. We must present ourselves at Holloway Prison before four o'clock ; after that it is difficult to obtain admission. The rules are strict on that point."

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**X.** That I am becoming, or have become, xanthodontous cannot be of interest to anybody. Nor am I likely to contract xenogamy. I admit a certain amount of xenomania.

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**YANN.** This takes me back to Loti, who didn't realise, or didn't want to realise, that the genuine Icelandic fisherman stinks so fearsomely that you can't go within six yajds of him.

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**ZORAÏDE TURC.** Frédéric and Deslauriers, having learned to smoke a pipe, went to visit la Turque :

"On appelait ainsi une femme qui se nommait de son vrai nom Zoraïde Turc ; et beaucoup de personnes la croyaient une musulmane, une Turque, ce qui ajoutait à la poésie de son établissement, situé au bord de l'eau, derrière le rempart ; même en plein été, il y avait de l'ombre autour de sa maison, reconnaissable à un bocal de poissons rouges près d'un pot de réséda sur une fenêtre. Des demoiselles, en camisole blanche, avec du fard aux pommettes et de longues boucles d'oreilles, frappaient aux carreaux quand on passait, et, le soir, sur le pas de la porte, chantonnaient doucement d'une voix rauque."

And the story ends :

" 'C'est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur ! ' dit Frédéric.  
 ' Oui, peut-être bien ? C'est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur ! ' dit Deslauriers."

FLAUBERT, *L'Éducation Sentimentale*

**Aug. 30** Am trying a lighter vein of literary criticism :  
**Friday.**

*Pipe Night*, by John O'Hara.

Thirty-one American short stories in the Dorothy Parker class. Full of pep and bite, and immensely readable provided you can read them at all. The lingo, I mean.

"So Quinn asked me to join them and I did and this mouse with them named Jean Benedict looks like 10,000 other dames on the line of some B'way show except when she opens her trap she has an accent that is so British even Sir Neville Chamberlin would not be able to understand her."

I hold this to be ten times better English than James Joyce wrote towards the end of his life, and a hundred and fifty times better than Gertrude Stein wrote at any wrote wrote at wrote wrote wrote period any any at.

Sept. 2      It was a shock to open *The Times* this morning and read  
Monday.      that Granville-Barker had died. I never met him. My  
estimate, for what it is worth, is something like this. A  
man of near-genius who kept running away from one job to do  
another. A, to me, intolerable actor, perhaps because *Man and*  
*Superman* is, to me, an intolerable play, and I did not see him in  
anything else. About G.-B. as dramatist I could never quite make  
up my mind. Here is a piece of what I wrote about the revival of  
*The Voysey Inheritance* at Sadler's Wells in 1934 :

Mr Granville-Barker obviously wrote this play on the assumption that a chip off the old block is as interesting as the old block itself. It isn't, and won't be till it becomes an old block in its turn. That is why nobody has ever really cared whether Edward Voysey decides to throw up the sponge or carry to a successful issue his father's malpractices. The first two acts, in which we see the old buccaneer in full sail, are magnificent. In the third the interest begins to fall away. In the fourth the play is over and the talking has begun, until we finally get to the fifth, where the Voysey family, with all its knees under the dining-room table, waits for half-past eleven to strike before beginning to discuss the place of the upper-middle-class in society. . . . At the beginning of the evening Mr Felix Aylmer was first-class, and in the middle of presumably the same evening Mr Maurice Evans was very good. In the small hours Mr O. B. Clarence was capital, and towards morning several ladies were excellent.

The *Manchester Guardian* says : "He could teach people how to act." I don't believe this, and reject all evidence in support. Less than a month ago Cedric Hardwicke said to Jack Priestley and me in his room at the Savoy, "Nobody can teach anybody to act." I agree. Nobody can teach anybody to be poet, dramatist, actor, critic. It comes or it doesn't. Shall, therefore, pass over the producer side of G.-B. and go on to regret the time he wasted over translating Spanish and French plays when he might have been getting on with the thing he will live by—the Prefaces to Shakespeare. The Vedrenne-Barker

Experiment and the subsequent managements, all associated with the intellectual theatre ? Yes, but these have vanished, whereas the Prefaces are tangible, living pieces of writing. And, alas ! only nine of them, and *Macbeth* ignored. Granville-Barker was the English theatre's great hope from 1904 to 1914, when, on the outbreak of war, he went to New York and, says the *M.G.*, "ceased directly to influence the English theatre, in whose development during the early years of the twentieth century he had played so considerable a part." The truth about Granville-Barker, always as I see it, is that there was not enough grindstone in his life.

Sept. 8      Letter from Ernest Helme :  
Tuesday.

*Llangennith*  
*Swansea*

MY DEAR JAMES,

The Garcias would naturally acclaim Jenny Lind, as she was their pupil and owed everything to old Manuel Garcia, who in 1841, after she had made her name in Sweden, ordered complete rest for twelve months, which were devoted to study of correct deep-breathing in an attempt to increase the power of her voice, in which, however, he was unsuccessful. Now Patti never had a lesson in voice production in her life, but studied her enormous répertoire of operatic rôles with her brother-in-law Strakosch. Jenny Lind scored a big success in only one operatic rôle, in Donizetti's Opéra Comique *La Fille du Régiment*, which also, fortunately for her, happened to be Queen Victoria's favourite opera. J. L. was at this time the only artist who sang in German, which was naturally very pleasing to the Prince Consort and therefore to the Queen.

Jenny Lind may, must, have been elated by her enormous success as Marie (*La Fille du Régiment*) and to a lesser degree in Meyerbeer's (a great admirer of her, who introduced her to Berlin) *Robert-le-Diable*, and she was then so ill-advised as to attempt the great dramatic rôles such as Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) and Norma, which were associated still with Grisi (the greatest dramatic soprano of all time) ; the consequence was complete failure, and J. L. retired for ever from the operatic stage (which she had only graced in London for two seasons) in 1849 when she sang in *Robert-le-Diable* at Her Majesty's. My grandmother, a fine musician, *abonnée* at the Opera all her life and a first-rate critic, heard her several times, and detested both her singing and acting, always alleging that her voice was thin and wiry and her intonation unreliable, as she was apt to sing sharp at times. My grandfather, who had worshipped at the shrine of Malibran, concurred in this



criticism, and he could not tolerate any artist with such a stupid face. J. L., however, was by no means stupid, as she proved in her American tour, when she placed herself in Barnum's hands, who advertised her before she had landed to an extent greater than has ever attended a singer before or since; and she can claim to have originated *réclame*.

My grandmother knew her personally and as Mme Goldschmidt. J. L. had been to our Essex house, where, however, she was not very popular, as, I have been told, she gave herself great airs. I personally have seen her singing in the chorus of the Bach Choir, which her husband directed. J. L. was also astute enough to cloak her failure and end of her extremely short operatic career under the pretext of her religious convictions, which were a valuable asset throughout her career in this country, more especially to the Queen and the then huge and influential Exeter Hall public.

Jenny Lind's private life was *sans reproche*. Patti enjoyed life, and was divorced by the Marquis de Caux (practically she bribed him and allowed him £2000 a year for life to get rid of him), with Nicolini, whom she subsequently married, as co-respondent; there was considerable scandal at the time; the British Public will always interfere in artists' private lives.

J. L. made her name remembered through concert singing, and her career commenced in 1844 in Dresden and, with the exception of a charity concert in Malvern in 1883, ended in, I think, about 1856 after her marriage in Boston in 1852; though she made occasional appearances at the Big Festivals, as at Norwich, when in the St Andrew's Hall in a concert, whilst singing the Prayer in Agathe's Aria from Weber's *Der Freischütz*, she pretended to be so overcome with emotion that she fell on her knees. This vulgar exhibition was put on probably to please the large number of Norfolk Quakers amongst the audience; but she was accorded severe comment by the musicians present, and she did herself considerable harm.

In short. Patti natural and gifted. No musician. Jenny Lind. Studied. Handicapped by nature. A fine musician.

I don't suppose you'll wade through this.

Yours aye,

ERNEST HELME

**Sept. 5** Was a whole hour late for Gwen Chenhalls's luncheon  
**Thursday.** party. But Gwen is an understanding hostess and knows that journalists are not human. Found a great lady telling Basil Cameron he ought to think this and that about Beethoven, and Basil saying he ought indeed. Ivor Novello told us how in Bond Street he had met Lady X, almost bent double but as shimmeringly, jingly dressed as ever, and wearing a patch over one eye. "On the patch was pinned a bunch of violets." I said,

“ So Cleopatra didn’t die after all ! ” But the sally was lost owing to the irruption of a charming, undulating gazelle, a lovely creature to whom Joey Bagstock must have paid instant court. We drank Constantia, a delicious South African wine, tasting of furniture polish and with a bouquet like Peau d’Espagne. After the other guests had gone Gwen, who is a good violinist, played as much of the Mendelssohn Concerto as I could manage the piano part of. Not a good sentence ? It has been a very good lunch.

*Sept. 6* Lonsdale’s father and son in *But for the Grace of God* had  
*Friday.* not been on the St James’s stage two minutes to-night before I realised that this was the theatre of the ’nineties. I found the first act exciting. Gerard, the son, began his career of villainy in a low key, tentatively. The cur was at the snivelling stage ; biting could come later. Would the cur’s father lend him a thousand pounds ? No ? Then let him take what was coming to him, the father ; he, the son, proposed to go ‘ inside.’ Old Dog asked inside where ? “ Gaol ! ” snapped the boy, impatient at having to explain what a man of the world should take in with his mother’s milk. And now came a point which showed the Lonsdale weakness and strength. The father, shrugging his shoulders, said, “ Will you be leaving us for long ? ” Witty, but on the Wildean level, and not that of a purse-and-family-proud Scotch baronet. Compare that old play of Hankin’s in which the elder brother setting up for Parliament forced his father to despatch the younger and prodigal brother to Australia. “ I will allow you £250 a year and you may write once a month,” said the father. “ Make it £300,” said Eustace, “ and I won’t write ! ” Bless me, how little we have advanced since 1909—either in persiflage or probability. Nevertheless Lonsdale has a wit of his own, as when he didn’t stress the tell-tale little point that the amount the boy had embezzled was *nine hundred* pounds, the odd hundred being his profit. Gerard is the authentic, real-life version of the scapegrace who, in the sentimental drama of the ’seventies and ’eighties, would come back from the outer darkness “ in a soft hat and a cloak like Tennyson’s with white hair and a moved voice, as a Gold, Silver, or Copper King, the lovable fellow who in exile had let practical wisdom burn with a hard, gem-like flame resulting in a very ecstasy of acquisitiveness. He is often quite ‘ nice,’ and sometimes has a Virgil in his pocket.” One credited Gerard with having a Verlaine in his pocket to-night ; the type often has. Michael Gough made an engrossing, Firbankian creature out of Gerard—one felt that

he had this laugh, this *ricanement*, in the cradle. Unfortunately at the end of the first act a slight case of blackmail ended in a slight case of murder, and we saw no more of Gerard. And I lost interest in the play.

Sept. 7            From this morning's paper :  
Saturday.

The dreaded bolo punch—the short right upward swing aimed below the heart—of Ike Williams, Georgian negro world light-weight champion, paralysed Ronnie James and 40,000 Welsh fans at Ninian Park, Cardiff, to-night. James was knocked out in the ninth round. The crowd was hushed into silence by the murderous punch. Ten days ago I warned James of Ike Williams's murderous bolo—so called because it is delivered with the action that Malaysians use when hacking down the parasitic bolo plant with a long knife known as a bolo-knife. Williams saved this wonderful blow until the seventh round, and then swung it with terrifying power and accuracy so that it landed immediately below James's heart.

Going to lunch, I happened to see in the Charing Cross Road a copy of *Cashel Byron's Profession*. The preface to this shows how the young Shaw fell into the first infirmity of noble mind, the proneness to believe that what is non-intellectual must be dull :

The sport of prizefighting was supposed to have died of its own blackguardism by the second quarter of the century ; but the connoisseur who approaches the subject without moral bias will, I think, agree with me that it must have lived by its blackguardism and died of its intolerable tediousness ; for all prizefighters are not Cashel Byrons, and in barren dreariness and futility no spectacle on earth can contend with that of two exhausted men trying for hours to tire one another out at fisticuffs for the sake of their backers.

Can G. B. S. really have thought that the fight between the Gasman and Bill Neate was a dull thing ? Can he think to-day that to watch a couple of boloists in action is duller than, say, sitting at a repertory performance of *Back to Methuselah* ?

Sept. 8            Letter to George Lyttelton :  
Sunday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

This is a birthday letter—my birthday. In two hours' time I shall be sixty-nine. I grow old, Master Lyttelton, and my temper

is not what it was. I spent yesterday in a state of frenzy in comparison with which Lear was a baby banging his spoon. And here is the reason. I had written a goodish review of a book about boxing and singled out this passage :

“ ‘ The Bomber ’ is one of the great fighters of all time, and no one can deny that in and out of the ring Joe Louis has done everything to elevate the standard of life among his fellow-countrymen. His behaviour was pathetically summed up by poor, blind Sam Langford, the great negro heavyweight of yesteryear, who, visiting Louis in training, touched his face with his groping hand, and said : ‘ You’ve brought credit to your race, Joe boy. You’ll beat Conn. It takes a million punches to get a referee’s decision, but only one to score a knockout.’ Langford, incidentally, sat at the ringside, in a twenty-five-pound seat bought for him by Louis, smelling the resin and listening to the thump of wet leather, and knowing that it was not the erudite men of learning, the lawyers, the doctors, or the writers who brought a new respect for the negro race, but the flailing fists of an illiterate cotton-picker from Alabama.”

To which I appended this note :

“ A good bit of writing which won’t pass the test of examination. All it says is that no white man can stand up to this negro. Good. But can this negro stand up to a gorilla. No. And is the scale we are talking in ascending or descending ? I leave it to the reader.”

Will you believe that some fool of a sub-editor cut the last sentence—from “ Langford, incidentally ” to “ Alabama ”—*but left the comment* ? I don’t mind being cut ; no experienced journalist does. But why not cut to make sense ? Were there not six lines from Coleridge, stuck in to fill up, that I would gladly have dispensed with ? To go back to my opening simile, I am a King Lear sub-edited by Edward Lear. Crown me with flowers ! Dost thou squiny at me ? Sa, sa, sa, sa.

I have a sixth sense which tells me when in the theatre I am going to be bored. For example, I knew beyond any peradventure that I should have fled shrieking from Ronald Duncan’s adaptation of Cocteau’s *The Eagle has Two Heads*. Wherefore I sent Harold Hobson. And how right I was ! *The Times* talked next morning of “ monstrous tirades ” and repetitiveness which “ becomes a little tiresome.” Wilson had his doubts about the play’s merits. *The Express* dismissed it as “ annoying.” Alan Dent wrote that it was obviously not intended to amuse or even perplex the multitude : “ It is esoteric, intricate, subtle, intellectual, highly literary blethers.” And Hobson writes in to-day’s *Sunday Times* : “ This is M. Cocteau’s idea of an agreeable evening. But not mine, thank you very much. A performance of remarkable stamina by Miss Eileen Herlie, who talks and talks and talks. . . .”

But what about my stamina ? Why should I listen and listen and listen to a speech taking some say twenty-one, and some

twenty-seven, minutes? (The famous *Récit de Thérémène* cannot be dragged out to more than eight minutes by the Comédie's slowest actor.) I wouldn't take it from Sarah herself. If the Herlie wants the stamp of my approval she must present herself in a berlie I can sit through. Yes, it is entirely due to my sixth sense that I am not in an asylum.

Look out for my Alphabet in *The Windmill*. Some of it, particularly the letter 'T,' is "un peu shoking," and perhaps a bit more. The point is whether they will take in prose from a non-highbrow the kind of stuff Bloomsbury never stops writing sonnets to.

But enough. In ten minutes I shall have spent sixty-nine years on this planet, and not more than forty-four of them misspent. I promised my mother not to smoke or drink until I was twenty-one. And my father that I would leave sex alone until I was twenty-five. I kept both promises.

Ever,

J. A.

P.S. "The bell then beating one—" Shakespeare's master-stroke. The bell, now beating twelve—sixty-nine ghosts file past.

*Sept. 9*      Sixty-nine. Lyons having asked me to write something  
*Monday.*    for the Golden Jubilee of the Troc, I have spent most of  
the day reconstructing the London of fifty years ago.  
Here are some bits :

Tennyson and Stevenson had died ; Gladstone and Beardsley were dying. The Maybrick case and the Baccarat scandal were things of the past, Dreyfus was safely on his island, "W. G." in the previous year had scored his hundredth century. In the womb of Time were still the Boer War, the defeat of Fitzsimmons by James J. Jeffries, the fifteen-stone boiler-maker, *The Belle of New York*, *Florodora*, *San Toy*, the drama of Shaw and Galsworthy.

So much for past and future. What about the present? I take down my *Yellow Book*. Here I am ravished by a lady in full evening dress playing a piano in a field. There is no stool, and the musician must needs stand to her instrument. Alas, the Japanese lanterns of Beardsley's day are all out, and the yellow of the old book has faded! What else happened in 1896 besides the antics of the æsthetes? The public was greatly incensed by the German Emperor's message to President Kruger respecting the defeat of Dr Jamson. The Queen received congratulations at having reigned longer than any British sovereign. Persimmon won the Derby for the Prince of Wales, who was present. Lord Rosebery resigned the leadership of the Liberal party. Lord Leighton died and received a public funeral at St Paul's. Alfred Austin was appointed Poet Laureate. The *Drummond Castle* was wrecked. Alfred Harmsworth founded the *Daily Mail*. Charles T. Woodridge, the trooper in the Royal Horse Guards to whom Wilde

dedicated *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, was executed for the murder of his wife. [This was a real find.] An international peace demonstration in Hyde Park was stopped by a thunderstorm. The year's first-nights included *The Sign of the Cross* (Wilson Barrett), *Cymbeline* (Irving and Ellen Terry), *As You Like It* (George Alexander and Julia Neilson, Aubrey Smith), *Richard III* (Irving and Geneviève Ward), Henry Arthur Jones's *Michael and his Lost Angel* (Forbes-Robertson and Marion Terry), *Magda* (Mrs Patrick Campbell), *Under the Red Robe* (Herbert Waring, Cyril Maude, Holman Clark, Winifred Emery), *Little Eyolf* (Mrs Patrick Campbell, Elizabeth Robins, Florence Farr, Courtenay Thorpe), *The Geisha* (Marie Tempest). The popular songs of the day were "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" (Lottie Collins), "Twiggy voo, My Boys" (Marie Lloyd), "Two Little Girls in Blue" (Lily Burnand), "Down the Road" and "It's a Great Big Shame" (Gus Elen), "At Trinity Church" (Tom Costello). Thomas Hardy, annoyed at the reception given to *Jude the Obscure*, had packed up novel-writing. George Meredith was revising his works. Harold Frederick published *Illumination*, Flora Annie Steel *On the Face of the Waters*, Kipling *The Seven Seas*. Wells was preparing to follow up *The Time Machine*. W. W. Jacobs was being very, very funny, and Bennett and Conrad were preparing to be very, very serious. Max Beerbohm, an old man of twenty-four, issued his *Works*.

Sept. 10 Letter from Peter Forster, the young man who didn't  
Tuesday. know where Wiltshire is :

Cairo

DEAR MR AGATE,

What do you think was the first thing to greet me on landing yesterday ? A native, boosting his sales of the *Egyptian Mail*, by yelling "Sheamus Act !" which weird words turned out to be nothing less than a far-flung version of your name, over an article "Harry—Hero or Cad ?" illustrated by a portrait of "Mr Laurence Olivier," looking like a *jeune premier* of the period 1912 ! "That, Sir, is true fame," said Dr Johnson !

Egypt is remarkable for three things : (1) the smell, (2) the national determination to keep death *on* the roads, (3) the Pyramids. In that order. I was taken this afternoon to see the Sphinx : a most unnecessary rock, I thought, standing out there in the middle of the desert. And the heat . . . I am melting, Egypt, melting. So much for the land of portentous gongs and Sydney Greenstreet ! But whiskey is as cheap as water, and laundry comes back in a day !

I expect to move on almost immediately, though where to I have no idea ; I am beginning to think that my destination is the one real mystery of the East !

Yours,  
PETER FORSTER

*Winged Words. No. 17 :*

The newest—and most difficult—hat is Le Groux's Mang'betu turban. It's so called because it exactly follows the line of the headdress worn by this Central African tribe.

*Daily paper*

*Sept. 11* Brian Desmond Hurst turns out to have done an admirable job of work in the Arnhem film, the Press show of which I attended this morning. Very noble and very moving, with the saving grace of some occasional humour. Napoleon or somebody said that an army marches on its stomach. I think that Haig in the First World War and Montgomery in the Second would agree that the British soldier lives by and on his sense of humour. I have no doubt that many a man spent those eight days at Arnhem in a mortal funk ; I doubt whether a single man ceased to see the comic side of discomfort. This in the film ranges from the dry humour of the high-ups to the Rabelaisian lubricity of the low-downs. One of the Arnhem colonels is told by the Germans that if he doesn't evacuate his headquarters the German tanks will blast him out. "Surrender and let your men indicate same by waving white handkerchiefs." "Blimey," says a Tommy, "white 'ankerchers arter six days of this muck ? Wot does 'e take us for—a lot o' bloomin' pansies ?" And again, when a sergeant tumbles into a narrow trench and the occupant says, "I say, Sarge, don't you go taking off your boots in my boodwah. Wot would the neighbours think ?" The picture confers upon the screen a dignity which one had thought to be the exclusive property of the flesh-and-blood stage. It is enormously helped by Guy Warwick's music. Now and again there are shots of great beauty, as when a snowstorm overtakes the summer sky and the flakes turn out to be parachutes, and the music tinkles as in Cyril Scott's *Rainbow Trout*. I had Devas Jones with me, and he sniffed and blew his nose more than a hard-bitten major should. One small criticism. I remember, when I was R.T.O. at Arles during the First World War, General Plumer coming through with a train-load of men. The train pulled up for ten minutes, and just as I started it off again a Tommy came running and holding his trousers up with both hands. I flagged the train to stop and the General said, "When the Last Trump sounds it will find some British Tommy on the latrines and refusing to budge." There was only one French accent in to-day's film, and they got it wrong. The Last Trump will find some British compositor insisting that a grave accent is an acute.

Sept. 12      The Gentle Art again. Letter to Hugh Beaumont :  
Thursday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR BINKY,

I had a telephone message from your secretary asking me to go and see Miss Herlie. Will you bear with me for a few lines ?

I am highly sympathetic about the work being done at the Lyric, Hammersmith ; I put the best of my thought and the utmost space at my disposal into *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Summer at Nohant*, and *Fear No More*. Whether I was right or wrong in my opinions about these plays isn't the point. I happen to hold that the modern poetic drama is pretentious nonsense. I was not gammoned by *Murder in the Cathedral*, and will not be gammoned by stuff of the *Turn Right for the Crematorium !* order. Work of this kind bores me to a point which at my age I can no longer stand. I get a kind of mental claustrophobia and feel that I shall cause a disturbance. I am utterly unable to sit through a speech which is one thousand words longer than the famous *Récit de Thérémène* and the Inquisitor's jawbation in *St Joan* put together.

Now obviously it would be unfair for me to criticise productions to which I am completely allergic, and that is why I hand them over to Harold Hobson. On the other hand I can quite understand that Miss Herlie may want me to see her performance. It would be mock-modesty for me to pretend that the opinion of the senior critic of the *Sunday Times* carries no weight. Wherefore I make the following suggestion. Why not let me see Miss Herlie in something more seeable than the modern poetic drama ? Why not let me see her as Lady Macbeth, Mrs Alving, Paula Tanqueray ? My best suggestion is that the Council of Four should put on Strindberg's *Dance of Death* for her ; with a little contrivance both parts could go into one evening. The stage setting is nothing, and there are only three and a half characters that matter. Miss Herlie, judging from her performance in *The Trojan Women*, would be superb as Alice, and there would be a lot of kudos for everybody.

Yours sincerely,

JAMES AGATE

Hugh Beaumont, Esq.  
H. M. Tennent, Ltd.  
Globe Theatre, W.1

The Beaver gave a good party at the Savoy last night prior to his departure for Canada. "Business or pleasure ?" I asked. He said, "I'm going to talk to my old minister about my soul." I said, "You'll have a lot to talk about !" He said, "James, I'm going to put you in charge of the paper while I'm away. Bully Robertson [managing director] and keep a tight hand on Chris [editor]. As for



your own contributions, carry on as usual. The maximum of quotations and the minimum of original matter."

*Sept. 18* The *Yorkshire Dalesman* publishes an article by Brother *Friday*. Harry giving an account of the summer holidays spent by the Agate family in Appletreewick fifty years ago. Harry writes :

But there were wet days too, days when outdoor activities had to be restricted. For these days also the five boys provided. *Together they produced a Magazine*. As a family they had many friends, and the boys' father invited these friends in relays to join the family party at Low Hall. While, on these wet days, the elders read or played cards, the boys were busy writing their magazine for parental and guest consumption. No. 1 of this single-copy, hand-written, 16-foolscap-page journal, bearing the somewhat grandiloquent title of the *Craven Times*, appeared on the 13th August 1894. This lone copy has miraculously survived many removals, and, glancing through its pages, one is set to speculating whether modern city-born-and-bred young folk to-day, accustomed to ready-made amusement as they are, ever think of putting forward during a holiday so much effort as was necessitated by this production for the entertainment of parents and friends.

No. 1 of the *Craven Times* had fourteen sections, as follows :

1. Chronicle—a diary and comments on events at Low Hall.
2. English Parliament—a history by C. G. A.
3. Book review, *Dodo*, by J. E. A.
4. Notes on Low Hall cricket.
5. Musicalia, by E. A.
6. Weather diary.
7. Visitors' list—a record of arrivals and departures.
8. Accounts of excursions by wagonette.
9. Engagements.
10. Page of puzzles, by H. B. A.
11. Correspondence.
12. An essay on "Courage," by S. E. A.
13. Batting and bowling.
14. Editor's notes.

Here indeed was no 'gutter' Press, with its stunts and catch headlines, but an attempt, albeit private and immature, at serious journalism

This set me hunting with the result that I found something I thought I had lost—an earlier paper entitled the *Appletreewick Journal*, edited by me (fourteen) and Brother Mycroft (thirteen), from which I quoted extracts in the Introduction to *Ego*. This begins :

Mr Agate, Mrs Agate, Miss Young [my aunt], and nurse [Lizzie Barson, happily still with us] journeyed down to Low Hall on the 8th in not very favourable weather. The ride from Skipton was charming. At the station we were warmly welcomed by our old friends Mr Ramsden and Tom; we came from Skipton in two wagonettes. Mr Ramsden with Mr and Mrs Agate, "Baby" [Brother Harry], Sydney, and nurse leading. The rest of us followed with Tom. It must, however, be remarked that Mr Ramsden's horse was by no means equal to Tom's, for several times Tom's was compelled to wait for them to go on. Mrs Holden was there to meet us, and we once more crossed the threshold of dear old Low Hall.

The "Hours of Regulation at Low Hall" will be found on the drawing-room mantel-shelf, so that anyone may refer to them.

The editors have great pleasure in announcing that the most celebrated Lady Cricketer, Miss Young, during her stay at Low Hall will make several appearances.

Mrs Agate looks for help and comfort from all the boys staying at Low Hall, as she has provided many things for all our comfort and has gone to great trouble about packing, 'etc. We sincerely hope due attention will be paid to this most important article.

I say nothing about a letter from Brother Edward pleading for revivals of *Semiramide* and *Zampa*, and a sentimental poem by Brother Mycroft, though this isn't bad for thirteen :

The greenest leaves are sere and yellow laid,  
And barest branches everywhere I see,  
And memories crowd on me that time has made,  
Till death itself feels welcome now to me!!!

What I cannot resist is the following. It should be said that C. J. Agate was our father, then getting on for sixty, and that the only available cricket material was his gracious self and his four elder sons, Harry being too young. (My father played with us every day, and went solemnly through the formality of donning pads and gloves. He was a very good underhand bowler, and always kept a perfect length.) We played with a net for wicket-keeper, and as everybody took part all the time that gave us one batsman, one bowler, and three fielders. It fell to me to keep the record of every ball bowled. Here, then, is a page. The date is August 15, 1891 :

### CRICKET

C. J. Agate Esq.'s team v. J. E. Agate's team. C. J. Agate's team commenced their innings sending S. Agate to the wicket to the bowling of C. G. Agate. In C. G. Agate's first over S. Agate was caught one-handed at cover-point by J. Agate, and E. Agate came in. He hit the bowling very much about, contrary to his

usual custom, playing well, and making 14, all singles. He very foolishly ran himself out, just as he was getting set. C. J. Agate then went in. Their hopes were high, and they said

We should not have done  
Hunting the leather till set of sun.

But it was not to be so. With one of C. G. Agate's balls he was out. He hit the ball; it rolled toward his wicket. In attempting to stop it he hit his wicket. Their innings closed for 14. J. Agate's side commenced their innings after a short interval. J. Agate made two off the first ball, and one off the second. C. J. Agate's third ball he ran out to drive, missed it, and was bowled. C. G. Agate went in and played very well. At the call of time the score was 22 for 1 wicket, C. G. Agate (not out) 19.

Note the egotism even at that age. J. Agate makes a one-handed catch. J. Agate is not bowled, but runs out to drive and misses!

And here is a contribution by Harry himself:

### DIARY OF A SMALL BOY

*By H. B. Agate*

- 6. 0. Arise myself.
- 6.30. Dress and down if can or sooner.
- 6.30-7.30. Do nothing.
- 7. 0. Put strite my box.
- 7.30. Bref. [breakfast].
- 8. 0. Finish bref.
- 8.30. Rest on sofa. Cork work.
- 9. 0. Chest [sketch].
- 10. 0. Go walk.
- 12.59. Come in and wash my face.
- 1. 0. Eat my dinner.
- 2. 0. If dirty wash my hands go out to burnsall go to mister dales buy 1 penny sweets each day.
- 5. 0. Have my tea.
- 6. 0. Play.
- 7.30. Go to bed if allowed to stop up 8.0.

The fact that these journals of sixteen foolscap pages, all of them fair-copied in one hand, came out weekly throughout the five weeks of our summer holidays and were resumed every summer that we spent at Appletreewick argues much for the principle of industry instilled into us by our beloved parents. The journals came to an end with the arrival of a baby sister (May), when Llanfairfechan took the place of Appletreewick, and we were all too busy doting and waiting on her to bother about journalism.

*Sept. 14*      Friendly letter from "Binky" Beaumont removing all  
*Saturday.*      shadow of trouble between us. Making new friends is  
a change from losing old ones.

Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel . . .

is all very well. But suppose the man you thought to be your friend turns out to be a Houdini? I have come to the conclusion that there is no such thing as modern friendship (*a*) between women and (*b*) between men. Friendship between women is unthinkable; a new hat is enough to wreck it. In the Forest of Arden Rosalind made a fuss of Celia merely in order to have some one to confide in; woe betide that little besom if Orlando had fallen for *her*! A smattering of the real thing between Diana of the Crossways and Lady Dunstane? Nonsense. That friendship existed merely to enable the parties to it to loll in elegant equipages, hold parasols, and exchange epigrams. Dickens's Sairey Gamp and Betsy Prig? Even that partnership foundered on the rock of Mrs Harris. Not here the true gold of friendship, the gold as has passed the furnace!

But who can doubt Traddles's affection for David, or Pip's for Joe Gargery? Had Sam Weller friendship for Mr Pickwick? Yes, but that fathering of the great baby was not without a smack of amiable contempt. Is it old-fogyish to like to read about East and Arthur in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*? I confess to greater pleasure in Stalky and M'Turk and Beetle. Also Kipling's Soldiers Three—Mulvaney, Learoyd, Ortheris. Magnificent fellows, though I think my favourite is the Cockney, whose speech to the recruits I know by heart: "Don't you think you've come into the H'army to drink Heno, an' club your comp'ny, an' lie on your cots an' scratch your fat heads. You can do that at 'ome sellin' matches, which is all you're fit for, you keb-huntin', penny-toy, bootlace, baggage-tout, 'orse-'oldin', sandwich-backed soors, you." This is better than Stevenson's boasted Musketeers. There is another trio of whom I never tire: Pooter, Cummings, and Gowing. As another in the same field I call attention to one of the best sentences that was ever diarised: "The parlour bell is broken, and the front door rings up in the servant's bedroom, which is ridiculous." A really delightful trio is that of Harry the Horse, Spanish John, and Little Isadore. The narrator of the Damon Runyon stories does not know where these three live because they don't live anywhere in particular. It is they who get Mr Jabez Tuesday out of his breach-of-promise affair with Miss Amelia Bodkin. It is they who put the snatch on Bookie Bob. Personally I do not

wish for any part of them. But I can see that they are very good friends, at that. What was there about Boswell that made Johnson, at an advanced age, go walking with him in the Hebrides? What affinity was it that made Hazlitt a lifelong friend of long-winded Coleridge? What bound Dickens to that boring Forster? Or Samuel Butler to that bone-dry Festing Jones? Did they all heed Johnson's "A man, Sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair"? But I grow to an essay and must stop.

*Sept. 15 Sunday.* Sent my second contribution to the American *Go* magazine. To be able to write what I really think, unhampered by the susceptibilities of the people one is always running across—this is as good as a visit to the seaside. Here is part of what I am saying:

It needs an Ibsen to point out the evil that genius brings in its train. A Béla Bartók masterpiece—if there is such a thing, which I doubt—at once gives birth to twenty cacophonous scrapings calling themselves violin concertos. Picasso is immediately succeeded by pretentious nincompoops who, unlike the master, couldn't draw if they tried. In the film world a *Citizen Kane* is succeeded by phantasmagoria which would be hissed off the screen if the producer allowed one enough light to see them by. It is the same with the theatre. Let me take it that there is some merit in the dramatic works of T. S. Eliot and Maxwell Anderson. What happens? A number of young men too lazy to do a day's work and too unkempt to be tolerated in any office imagine that they have only to string some pretentious rubbish together, rubbish without action, sense of character, or wit, to achieve a masterpiece of the first order. *The Other Side* (Comedy) was an adaptation by Ronald Millar of Storm Jameson's book. The first act was all about what the French should do with the repentant Nazi, after which the play degenerated into a thriller about a Nazi who was not repentant at all. The first night was graced by the presence of Charles Morgan, looking as though he had taken the entire French genius under his wing . . .

Am off to Paris to-morrow, having been invited by the French Government to attend the Film Festival at Cannes. In view of the hazards of a Continental journey and some films I have recently seen about George M. Cohan, George Gershwin, Cole Porter, and others I think it advisable to bequeath to posterity the outline of any picture which may at some future date be made about me: The son of Henry Irving and Sarah Bernhardt, I was found in a bassinette on the sands at Deauville. Adopted by an English maiden lady of bizarre tastes, who arranged for my education at the Muswell Hill

Academy of Music. At the age of seven appeared at the St James's Hall, giving a rendering of Scriabin's Study for the Left Hand, which was acclaimed by the music critics of the day as second to everybody. The end of the film is tragic. During the second act of *Jam Tarts* I rise in my stall, stutter "In the name of Dame Madge Kendal," expire, and am received into a Technicolor Hereafter by Hazlitt, G. H. Lewes, George Jean Nathan (who has unhappily predeceased me), and the M.-G.-M. choir of angels.

*Sept. 16* Wilfred Rouse comes with me to Paris, and afterwards  
*Monday.* Cannes, for the Film Festival. Willie is the perfect courier, who realises that a ten-bob tip saves a pound's worth of discomfort. (The secret of foreign travel is to sit still and let somebody else do the running about.) Four hundred and seventy-two francs to the pound. Eightieth birthday of Tristan Bernard, and perfectly remember Coquelin as the Interpreter in *L'Anglais tel qu'on le parle*, who got his job on the strength of three English phrases—'Ow do you do? Little Tich, Vataire-closet. Dieppe, some time in the 'nineties. The old play accounts for my sudden outbreak, on seeing the sign "Messieurs," of French *tel que* Terry Rattigan's characters speak it: "Un demi-jiffy. Je vais popper dans ici." Perfect weather, with land and seascape decked out in primary colours as in a travel poster. Am the only person on board with a bowler, which is perhaps the reason the Captain invites us on to the bridge. From here we get a distant glimpse of the *Helena Modjeska*, the American steamer which broke her back on the Goodwin Sands last Thursday, and whose captain committed suicide in a Ramsgate hotel yesterday. The only passenger I recognise is the French boxer that Bruce Woodcock gave a drubbing to the other day. And now nostalgia has me in its grip. Meaning gulps at all the well-remembered things—the fields and trees, the groups of workmen who really work, the carts drawn by three horses abreast, willing slaves on whom no care is lavished, the coquetry of the villas, the magnificence of two châteaux glimpsed for a moment, the silly ornamental gates standing alone and with no walls or palings to keep them in countenance, Amiens, where in 1915 I had a wonderful shave, the mixture of peremptoriness and ingratiating which characterises the French dining-car attendant, the food which the most unexacting could not mistake for English garbage. Hors-d'œuvres, veal, cream cheese, and grapes. The bill for two, including a bottle of rough Rhône wine, is Frs. 728·20. No taxis, so take an antiquated fiacre drawn by the oldest and

most melancholy horse I have ever set eyes on. Fare to the Hôtel Sainte-Anne Frs. 250, or rather more than ten shillings, whereas a London taxi-driver would have been delighted with, say, four bob. Dinner at the Café de la Paix—onion soup, eggs and bacon, beer, coffee, and brandy—cost Frs. 700. On the whole I think Paris is no dearer than London. What struck me most to-day was the appalling damage left by the Hun at Pont de Briques, the crowded suburban trains with passengers hanging half out of the windows and doors and perching precariously on the running-board, the emptiness of the cafés, the lack of gaiety, the flood-lit Opera. Add the Calais porter who took our luggage, six-foot seven and the strappingest, most Michaelangellesque ruffian I have ever set eyes on. A fist to fell beeves and span the better part of three octaves. Can't understand why some French Lady Wishfort hasn't snapped him up. Balzac's Diane de Maufrigneuse would have hung him at her girdle as a prelude to a ten-page lecture to Nathan on the maternal instinct. Bed at 12.30, very tired after a long day.

*Sept. 17* But I was too tired to sleep, just as this morning I am  
*Tuesday.* too tired to do anything except work. Sat up till 3 A.M. reading Montague's *The Right Place*. When, oh, when, will our young highbrows recognise this great master?

The upshot of C. E. M.'s book is that to the man of full mind the right place is wherever he happens to be. How many right places have I known? Giggleswick, where I learned self-reliance—not the Manchester Grammar School, where I merely imbibed knowledge. The mill at Nelson where I learned the art of weaving, and not the grimy Manchester office where I sold the disgusting, smelly stuff. The First World War, where I thought I was doing something if it was only bundling hay. And most of all Provence. I can still see those windswept terraces of stunted olive-trees and smell the thyme that grows between the pebbles of the Crau. Have conjured Wilfred to wake me to-morrow as the train nears Avignon. I want to have every sense alert as we pass through Arles.

In the meantime here are to-day's doings, which are precisely nothing. Took a tip from the French and walked about, not with any destination in view, but to and fro, like Lamb's Superannuated Man. Considered buying a dressing-gown in crimson velvet that would have vastly become the Prince Regent. Price Frs. 22,000. Refrained. Took our apéritifs at the Café de la Paix, and got great fun out of the half-hourly motor collisions. Lunch—omelette made of

real eggs, liver pâté, salad, and grapes—Frs. 1850. After lunch sat about, sometimes sitting and thinking and sometimes just sitting. Have been in Paris the best part of two days and still not seen a man with my kind of hat. Why is there no Manet to paint my portrait and call it *L'Homme au Bowler* ?

*Sept. 18* Nothing like a Government for making a muddle.  
*Wednesday.* They told us we were dining on the train, only to find that there was no restaurant car. Fortunately we arrived 1½ hours too soon, which enabled us once more to admire—for Willie concurred—that wonderful room whose bedaubed and bedizened ceiling shouts down on one with Sitwellian magniloquence. Was roused as we entered Avignon by Willie singing *Ah, fuyez, douce image* !! at the top of his crazy voice. Found Provence just as I remembered it, down to the tethered goats. A trifle melancholy as far as Marseilles. “*Que de fois je voudrais venir ici me guérir de Londres et de ses first-nights !*” And then I bethought me of the opening sentence to Montague’s book : “You may wonder how it will feel, to find you are old, and able to travel no more.” But I am able, and I say to that invalid-chair bogey, “Know thy betters !” Flattering reception and all well, except that they had put me at the Carlton and Willie at the Martinez. On my inquiring the time of the next train for London this was at once put right. We are both at the Martinez, where the *luxe* is *insolent* without being *écrasant*.

*Sept. 19* Am writing this with almost nothing on by an open  
*Thursday.* window at eight o’clock of what is obviously going to be a blazing hot day. There is a milk-white Tennysonian sail in the bay and another that is pure turquoise ; the hills on the farther side are beginning to come through the haze. Fortunately we are leaving in four days from now. Another day and I should have lost all interest in books, music, theatre, film ; will-power would be sapped, and I should laze about like everybody else. These Southern Frenchies have the fantastic notion that life is something to be enjoyed ; as an Englishman I am not used to this, and it disconcerts me. For twenty-four hours I have seen nothing but brown bodies ; I don’t believe that there is a mind in Cannes or that, if there is, it is functioning. For my part I continue to be aggressively English. I will not wear an open shirt with half-sleeves, or shorts, or sandals. I stick to my collar, tie, and, of course, bowler.

Last night Willie and I tumbled across a *boîte* called the Zanzi-



Bar, or some such name, where the company consisted of the daughter of the house, witty and charming, her nondescript husband, two obvious tarts, an old flower-seller à la Marie Lloyd, an elderly gigolo, an American colonel, and a young man who might have been Yvonne Printemps' brother. Presently a row developed between the flower-seller and the gigolo. But a first-class row with horse, foot, artillery, and hand-grenades. Time and time again the flower-seller made tearful exit through the bead curtains only to come back with a fresh supply of insults, finally flinging the flowers at the head of the gigolo—who had more than held his own—so that some of them lodged in his toupet and he looked like a French King Lear. And all the time the proprietor, an enormously fat man, familiarly called La Poupée, sat behind his counter reading his paper and smoking the stump of a cigarette that never seemed to grow less. About midnight I found myself telling some of my best stories with a command of French slang I did not know I possessed. (I suspect it of being a good deal out of date and Zola-esque.) But it seemed to go down all right, and I haven't enjoyed myself so much since, at the party at the French Embassy, I showed the members of the Comédie Française how Sarah Bernhardt played Phèdre. Got home about two, and Willie came into my room to tell me that I had engaged Yvonne Printemps' brother as secretary at a salary of twenty pounds a week, and that he was coming round this morning to sign the contract! An entirely delightful evening. As I sit here on the fifth storey looking down on the Swedish, American, Belgian, French, English flags, and the pole from which the Russian emblem has been removed, I wonder whether Montague is right in saying that Leeds is just as much the "right place" as Athens if you look at it "with your mind and body decently fit, and your feelers well out and your retina burnished." Somehow or other I don't find Cannes a good advertisement for Colwyn Bay. Even the waiters, and I dare say the scullions, have more charm than our British *jeunes premiers*, and a taxi-driver who failed to keep his appointment with us last night has just telephoned to apologise!

Osbert Sitwell would have been the best writer to describe our experience of this afternoon—a visit to the Villa Sardou, in the Boulevard Carnot at Le Cannet, where Rachel died. The house is strictly closed to the public, and we were only allowed to inspect it on the representations of the Mayor that I have written a book about Rachel. For years I have dreamed of such a visit. The place was untouched. Here was the marble bed with its antique sculptures at the head and

the figure of Tragedy at the foot. Here was the *salle-à-manger*, with the decanters and glasses Rachel used. The salon is a very dark, long, narrow room with a ceiling representing the firmament. Exquisite stained-glass windows everywhere. Rachel's piano. The fireplace, in the shape of the trunk of a marble tree whose branches enclose the whole room, still black with smoke. Ceremonial chairs. Statues in every corner. Hearing of our visit, the owner of the house next door, which was formerly part of the Villa, showed us round an extraordinary affair of terraces, balconies, stairs, and towers, from which a hundred years ago there was an uninterrupted view of the sea. A miniature and baroque version of Tower Bridge with a faint suggestion of Mr Wemmick's Castle. It was all extraordinarily impressive, like a last act of Victor Hugo. We were shown round by a remarkable old lady of great age, who said, with finality, "Voici le lit de mort de Rachel. N'y touchez pas !" No plaque. Nothing to tell the passer-by that here, jealously guarded, are the last links with the world's greatest actress.

*Sept. 20* This morning there arrives for me at the hotel a photograph of Rachel's balcony, kindly sent by M. Marcel  
*Friday.* Lenormand, the owner of the other half of the villa. I wonder whether the dying Rachel ever climbed this and said sepulchrally :

Soleil, je te viens voir pour la dernière fois !

In the emotion yesterday I forgot to note another odd characteristic of the French—the idea that food is meant to be enjoyed. We took our lunch at a tiny restaurant called La Reine Pédaque, in the Rue du Maréchal Joffre. Ten kinds of hors-d'œuvres, deux œufs sur le plat, a mutton chop, French beans, Camembert, fruit, and a bottle of excellent Côtés du Rhône. Bill for the two of us, Frs. 870. Most amusing of all was an Englishwoman of quality who sat alone in the middle of the room, in yellow and with a purple parody of a hat, and looking as though at any moment she might turn into Henry Kendall's Duchess. In the evening a Battle of Flowers, charmingly carried out with a *camion* decorated to look like a Chariot of Victory by Cecil Beaton. Only one really vulgar exhibit—that offered by a film company whose name I don't propose to give. No drunkenness and no rowdyism. Some of the women were astonishingly beautiful, and the dresses were exquisite. After the flowers came the fireworks—a brilliant display which we saw perfectly from the hotel balcony. After that the Official Reception by the Mayor, to which we didn't go,

partly because we were too tired and partly because we weren't asked. (Not even a British Government could have so muddled this festival !) Instead Willie and I bought champagne and gave a little party to Yvonne Printemps' brother and his aunt. (Willie has coped with the secretaryship affair.) Oddly enough the young man has a *copain* in Paris who is the grand-nephew of Victorien Sardou, a relative of the Sardou who owned the Villa in Rachel's day. It was to the family of Victorien's brother that the Villa eventually passed. It occurs to me at this point that I have received no letters and not opened a newspaper since I left London. I don't know, or care, which conferences have made peace and which war, which trades are on strike, whether Goering and Co. have been hanged, and whether Joe Louis is still world champion. As I write this the floor-waiter arrives and asks if I would like to see the afternoon paper, which, he says, is of the most surprising interest. I open and read :

Neville Heath, qui soulève plus d'intérêt et d'émotion parmi les Londoniennes que n'importe quel chanteur de charme ou champion de cricket, est probablement un des fous les plus dangereux qui puissent exister : les deux crimes dont il paraît avoir été l'auteur ont été accomplis d'une façon particulièrement sadique. Tous deux semblaient absolument sans motif.

Later. The Festival is in a complete state of disorganisation. *There are no tickets.* Willie has this afternoon received a letter addressed to "Madame le Recteur Roussy," at the wrong hotel, containing invitations for last night's reception and an aviation meeting to be held after we have left. Six attempts to attend to-day's showing of *Cæsar and Cleopatra* have failed, and *The Times* is sitting in the corner with its head buried in its hands. In the meantime the aircraft carrier *Colossus* has arrived, and a plague of ants has broken out in my bedroom.

Still later. Attended a cocktail party given by the film producers in spite of not having received an invitation. Met the delicious Public Relations Officer, who, like Mrs Erlynne in Wilde's play, explained everything. And we agree that no woman can be expected to cope single-handed with twenty-four different Government Departments.

*Sept. 21* Yesterday's opening day at the Film Festival was a  
*Saturday.* fiasco. In the morning *Cæsar and Cleopatra* bored everybody stiff and sent British stock down to zero. The evening's principal film was the Mexican *Les Trois Mousquetaires*,

a travesty of Dumas's story in the Bob Hope manner. In Spanish, without sub-titles, and, as far as we could gather, totally unfunny. After two hours of this, in sweltering heat, the audience began to pour out in hundreds, preferring to stroll about in the open air till it was over. Willie and I went across to La Jetée, a charming café, where, under the lime-trees, we drank some cool beer and listened to an orchestra of eight deal with Liszt's *Les Préludes* and selections from Grieg, Wagner, and Sibelius. We returned an hour later to find the wretched film still going on to an almost empty hall! Some time after midnight they put on the new Hitchcock film, *Notorious*. At a quarter to one this was discontinued and re-started, as they had got the reels in the wrong order. Too much for us, and we left in search of supper, or anyhow a drink. We found this at the Zanzi-Bar, where a furious *bagarre* suddenly started, somebody saying that any Frenchman who allowed himself to submit to Buchenwald was *un lâche*. This was violently resented by two ex-Buchenwalders. Things were beginning to look ugly, when the barman rapped on the counter and said, "M'dames et M'sieurs, j'ai une triste nouvelle à vous annoncer. Raimu est mort ce soir." And at once the quarrel was submerged in the general grief.

This morning I attended a *conférence*, the idea being to set up an International Critics' Circle. On the adoption of the motion that delegates should not give their own personal views of films, but act as mouthpieces for the majority view, I left. Eric Dunstan motored us to lunch at his charming little estate, called Le Moulin de la Mourrachoux, about ten miles from Cannes. I cannot imagine a more lovely little house, situated on the banks of a stream and waterfall. "My nearest neighbour lives a mile and a half away," said Eric. "I have no idea who she is." Here we met Commander Tommy Thompson, personal attendant to Winston Churchill throughout the War, and Tommy Partington, whom somebody described as looking like a tame eagle accustomed to playing poker in church. What we ate and drank I don't remember, but it was exquisite. Everybody in very good form, the best remark being Eric's "I remember Sarah Bernhardt's funeral perfectly. I have never had so long to wait to cross the street." Still no letters and no English papers. But the French sheets are a joy. One of them, after noting the presence of Margaret Lockwood, Schiaparelli, and Duff Cooper, gets out of last night's fiasco with the headline: "Bing Crosby, Fred Astaire, et Erroll Flynn brillent par leur absence."

*Sept. 22* Willie burst into my room at 8 A.M. to ask if we would  
*Sunday.* take to-day's two o'clock 'plane or wait for seats on the train some time in October. Not sorry to leave Cannes, in spite of its amenities. The Festival has been the trouble. To be bored in Spanish and Russian was enough; last night they added Danish, with a film about some serious ass who bumped his head and imagined he was in love with a drug-addict. But I finished with all that twenty years ago when Pirandello's Emperor got his skull kicked in by a horse. In the meantime we are sitting at the airport in the taxi of our very good friend Lucien Gastaud, who has been charming to us in every way.

Later. After a wait of three hours we hear from the authorities that in view of the Aviation Meeting to-day's civil 'planes must be cancelled. Whereupon I hear myself say in Lady Bracknell's best tones, "Wilfred, we have already missed five, if not six, 'planes. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the runway." I now know the meaning of Existentialism. This is to make endless return to the hotel bedroom one has just vacated. Can we have the same rooms? Yes, we can. We must! That is the essence of Sartre. How are we to get to Paris to-morrow? And will it be to-morrow? There is a fifty-fifty chance that the air line will be working again; and if not there is talk of a military 'plane. (Railway accommodation is out of the question.) At this point I bitterly regret something I wrote in an earlier *Ego*: "There is a degree at which exasperation attains the ecstasy of the saints." This was to strike twelve before midnight. Never have I been so worried. Time-tables altered, hotels substituted, letters not delivered—the result is that at the *reprise* of *Auprès de ma Blonde* at the Michodière, with Yvonne Printemps and Pierre Fresnay, our two stalls, most ingeniously reserved by a French friend of mine who dotes on Yvonne, were the only two unoccupied seats in the house since the beginning of a phenomenal run! They have been reserved again for Tuesday. *But can we get there?* In the meantime we resolve to take things easy, and in pursuance of this go out to dine at our little restaurant and spend the rest of the evening listening to the orchestra under the limes discoursing Weber, Bizet, and Debussy, and recovering our tempers. After all, the property of Governments is to be idiotic. Does somebody have the pleasing idea that I should spend five days looking at the French cinema and five looking at the French theatre? Excellent! Is my grateful acceptance conveyed to the Departments concerned? But of course! Do the Departments correlate their

arrangements ? *That is not what Departments are for !* The result is that the French Government will have spent a lot of money, Willie and I will have got rid of £150, and I shall have no material for any article worth writing.

Midnight. A note has just been sent up praying that we will not present ourselves at the airport this afternoon, the service having been suspended by superior orders. Well, I have lived into the Age of the Atom Bomb. This week I have seen the perfecting of the Ancient Game of Sixes and Sevens now for the first time reduced to a science.

*Sept. 28* I think that 'taste' sums up the French character  
*Monday.* better than any other word. You see it everywhere—in their buildings, their table appointments, their manners, their little attentions. They lay themselves out to charm, and whether there is anything behind that charm doesn't seem to me to matter. I am tired of your surly Briton, and am not compensated by his heart of gold. The wardrobe in my bedroom is faced with book-bindings in imitation calf splendidly gilt. Balzac's *Père Goriot*, George Sand's *La Petite Fadette*, Zola's *Le Rêve*, Loti's *Matelot*, Flaubert's *Trois Contes*, Mérimée's *Colomba*, Willy's *Chéri*, Gide's *Isabelle*. Daudet, Bourget, Stendhal, Pierre Louys. I know that these are as little real as the books in a stage set. But they do what they are meant to do—they put French culture in the van of one's thoughts. One sense, the eye, has been satisfied, and to look farther is not to know how to live. An exquisitely dressed woman is a woman exquisitely dressed, whether she is faithful to her husband or not. The same holds about manners and sincerity. Our little *boîte* has provided us with more and better manners in one short week than all London's grill-rooms and restaurants since the beginning of the year. And then I am not at all sure that people don't get to resemble their manners. In the meantime if I had to invent a motto for these Southern Frenchmen, it would be, "Nothing is too small to give pleasure." Which does not mean that they are not infuriating. No news to-day about the promised 'plane ; Willie has been pestering the authorities since nine o'clock, going without lunch. Taxi-avion has offered us one seat on October 1 and another on October 14 ; Air France won't answer. Dreyfus was not more firmly fixed on his island than we are here. I dare hardly leave my room in case of a message, and somebody has just presented me with a leaflet inscribed "Taxis-Aériens. Départs quotidiens de Paris et de Cannes dans

toutes les directions sur simple demande "!!!! Now I seem to remember when I was at school noting two lines in *Julius Cæsar* :

Of your philosophy you make no use  
If you give place to accidental evils.

Wherefore I take an hour off and go to lunch at La Napoule while Willie sits on the authorities' tails. Heavenly little restaurant (Le Provençal) perched on the edge of the sea. Sun and glorious breeze. Œufs sur le plat, rougets, gigot, and a bottle of Châteauneuf du Pape. (Frs. 2058.25.) The chauffeur tells me all about his wife and little boy—for whose baby neck I promise a chain in the French manner—chatting the while in his soft *accent du Midi* of Martigues, Stes-Maries de la Mer, Istres, Fos-sur-Mer, Saint-Rémy, and lots of places that I have "loved long since and lost awhile."

*Sept. 24* Voluntary lotus-eating, yes. Compulsory ditto, no.  
*Tuesday.* Meaning that even the black market in transport has failed us. Everybody bribable has been approached without success ; even my best cigars have gone and nothing happens. I 'gin to be a-weary of the Provençal sun, of these ubiquitous red roofs and blue shutters, of all this charm that gets nothing done. Something of the Southern laziness has crept into my bones, or I should now be writing an essay on A Too, Too Distant Prospect of the Odeon Cinema. After all, what does it matter whether I get back this month, next month, next year ? And now I am at the end of my tether. There is nothing to do, and all day to do it in. I shall go and sit on the beach, always with my bowler, and pretend I like looking at the pale blue inanity of the sea, at the stomachs of wealthy *rentiers* and the *omoplates* of their womenfolk. That I find surf-riding, or whatever it is called, sensible. That I am not sick of piano-accordions. That my heart leaps up when I behold such signs as Liberty Plage, Les Dauphins, Waikiki, Les Flots Bleus. And there I shall sit until the Powers that Be have returned from that Festival Trip to Nice and Juan-les-Pins for which we shall doubtless receive the official invitation to-morrow morning. *En attendant* have wired my friend, asking him to make our excuses to the Théâtre de la Michodière.

Since writing the last sentence offers of transport have been pouring in. The Festival Authorities will fly us to Paris to-morrow if we pay a *supplément* of 5000 francs for two, the head-porter at the hotel offers two seats on a 'plane at 6000 francs each, while an enterprising firm at Nice offers to take us and any third person for an

inclusive fee of 56,000 francs. We have accepted the Festival offer. Here ends my first and last experience of foreign travel at the expense of foreign Governments. In future I shall pay my own fare and hotel bills, with Boulogne as the butt and sea-mark of my utmost sail.

*Sept. 25 Merde !* The arrangements yesterday morning were *Wednesday.* clear, definite, and precise. I took them down myself and repeated them twice. We were to present ourselves at the aerodrome at Mandelieu, Cannes, at 2.30 P.M. to-day, Willie to call on the Festival Transport Director at 9 A.M. with the cash. Good. We spent yesterday lounging and idling with a clear conscience, and in the evening threw a little party to Tommy Linden, the dancer, and one or two other London friends who had turned up. And went to bed with quiet minds. But this was to reckon without our hosts. The Transport Director, having gone over to Nice, and learned that the director of a travel agency there has two seats on a 'plane leaving at eight o'clock this morning, *books them and cancels the seats already arranged for this afternoon.* His telephonic message to this effect is taken down by a clerk and casually added to the papers on my dressing-table, where I find it when I wake this morning an hour after the 'plane has gone. Our cancelled seats have, of course, been snapped up.

So back to the treadmill again, since a beach is a treadmill to him who has not learned to idle. I am a poor nature-lover. I regard a field as a flat space on which to show off the paces of a horse, and a moor as something over which to drive a little white ball. I should not quarrel with the man who had no use for mountains apart from scrambling up and down them, or for streams except as they may be whipped for trout. Woods ? I know of nothing one can do with a wood except picnic in it. What, then, am I expected to do with a beach ? Comb it ? I sat for two hours this morning burying my toes in sand and wriggling them, after which I paddled ! Later, Willie and Tommy hired an odd contraption which is rowed by the feet, leaving me to read the Heath murder case in French. Turning to another page of the *Nice-Matin*, I find a photograph of Salford, my native town, showing a flooded street, and two lorry-drivers up to their waists in water. Would I were with them !

*Sept. 26 To drink champagne in the pink and gold heat, in a*  
*Thursday. décor by Emile Littler, ministered to by olive-skinned*  
ingratiation is pleasant but demoralising. I cannot read, and no longer want to write. There is nothing I feel impelled



to do, and I hate it. I have never been lazy before in all my life. How right the fellow in Kingsley's book was to shoot the English sailors who insisted on remaining behind with their native concubines ! To put on a sozzled elegance at midday and spend a hoggish afternoon in an armchair and a darkened room—this cannot be right. *En attendant* I have made some concessions. I no longer wear a collar, but a scarf, though the bowler perches *toujours*, giving the impression of an elderly Sid Field astray in France. "Slasher Guitry" is Tommy Linden's name for me down here.

*Sept. 27*      Our last day, thank Heaven ! Why my disgusting doctor  
*Friday.*      ever allowed me near this stoke-hole I can't understand ;  
                 he knows that Torquay kills me. I loathe the heat, and  
will make no sartorial compromise. I will *not* wear sandals, even if  
the alternative is sun-stroke ! I *will* wear the proper complement  
of clothes. My light suit, which is as far as I will go, is now so  
besweated and begrimed that I look like Charles Laughton in some  
story of Otaheite. For me better a winter of fogs in Holborn than  
a week of sunshine here. My one satisfaction is that I have  
managed to steer clear of the film-stars ; I have enough with  
the silly stuff they babble on the screen without wanting to hear  
what they invent for themselves. Anyhow, this is our last day.  
Unless . . .

There is a wonderful medieval story by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam called *La Torture par l'Espérance*. In this a wretched man, imprisoned for heresy, is allowed to escape. He passes through door after door, and just as he is about to draw the breath of freedom he finds himself in the arms of the Grand Inquisitor murmuring dreadful consolation about the love of the Church and the garnering of the poor wretch's soul. I hope fervently that something of the sort is not going to happen to us.

Willie began to-day by throwing a morning party, which, since his wit and Dante-like mask have made him a great success here, overflowed into my room. However, I managed to clear them all out soon after eleven, when I sallied forth to buy all those little things one is expected to bring back from abroad. Then once more that impossible beach, which, however, has taught me one thing—why the Buddhist contemplates his navel. By the greatest good luck I had slipped Vol. II of my big Hazlitt into my luggage, and so whiled away the time reading Thomas Holcroft's admirable *Diary* begun in June 1798 and kept up till March 1799. Wonderful stuff

and, I suppose, as dead as mutton. It gives me a thrill to read "After dinner, sat half an hour at Opie's. G. Dyer there." The friend of Lamb cropping up in a diary preserved by Hazlitt! And again :

Finished Boswell's *Life of Johnson* : the author still continuing a pompous egotist, servile and selfish and cunning. . . . As a piece of biography, it is a vile performance ; but as a collection of materials, it is a mine.

And what about this ?

Went to Debrett's. Met B—— and Parry. Saw Emery and Mrs Mills in second and third acts of *The Road to Ruin*. Both have merit. Emery the most. Second illumination night for Nelson's victory. Passed through the mean streets leading to the Seven Dials. The poor did not illuminate. I was in a coach, being too weak to walk.

And last :

Was in some danger of being run over by B—— D——, driving a kept woman furiously in a curricie.

*La Torture par l'Espérance* . . . Willie, returning at lunch-time, brings the horrific news that our departure is postponed till Sunday. The paper arriving at the same moment announces that Stromboli is in action for the first time in forty-five years. Good! It is time something burst.

Was sitting at the Café de la Jetée to-night listening to the music, when the pianist announced a piece I have not heard played for sixty years and more—Weber's *Rondo Brilliant*. This was part of my mother's repertoire, the notes of which, when I was a kid, used to come floating up to me in my bedroom at the top of the house together with the aroma of my father's cigar. Always the same programme. The "Moonlight Sonata," Chopin's *Fantaisie-Improptu*, this *Rondo*, Thalberg's Arrangement of *La Sonnambula*. When my aunt took my mother's place the pieces were Beethoven's Funeral March Sonata, Schumann's *Arabeske*, two of the *Improptus* of Schubert, two waltzes of Chopin, and Pauer's Arrangement of *Norma*. I have never heard any of those pieces better played in my entire life. I will go further : I never heard them so well played. They were not taught for nothing in Heidelberg, by Heinefetter, on a piano that had belonged to Chopin. I could teach them, with one finger, to most of to-day's performers . . .

Sept. 28 "A blank, my lord."  
Saturday.

Sept. 29 Paris. The drive to Nice was lovely, and the air trip  
Sunday. bearable, once I had got over my initial *frousse*. But there's many a slip between French cup and lip. *The 'plane had no licence to proceed farther than Paris!* So here we are dumped in a little *hôtel* in the Rue Caumartin wondering what we shall do, since our money is all gone except for what remains after 'liquidating' my dress clothes and half of Willie's wardrobe.

Sept. 30 Still Paris. This is the ninth day of our attempt to get  
Monday. home. It is midday, and the representative of the air company which took our money for the complete journey to London and then dumped us here has not yet returned from his week-end. I have been sitting in the doorway of this hotel since eight o'clock this morning watching the coal-man and what I call the Jean Gabinerie of the French streets. As it is Monday no shops in this maddening place are open; one cannot get either a shave or a newspaper. At the moment I am watching an elderly Frenchman of distinguished appearance pick up ends of cigarettes and stow them away in what appears to be a silver box.

Am I going, or have I gone, mad? Twice seats have been reserved for us at the Théâtre de la Michodière for the *reprise* of *Auprès de ma Blonde*. The little paper called *Paris-presse* has just arrived, and there is no mention of the revival *at any theatre!* What is being played at the Michodière is something announced as *Ars. et V. dentelles*. At this point Eric Portman drives up in a car, says I never looked saner, and what about a glass of champagne? I thank him kindly, and accept on the strict understanding that I don't offer him one in return, Willie meanly declining to part with his wrist-watch, and me determined to hang on to my cuff-links as long as possible.

Later. Have just run into Harold Nicolson. Also very kind, and makes me feel less like an orphan of the storm. And now Willie arrives with the news that the air-company representative has returned from his week-end, has created hell all round, and ordered a 'plane from London which is to take us home to-morrow morning. I shan't believe it till the wheels are off the ground. Propose, if we can afford it, going to see Louis Jouvet in something or other at the Athénée. Stroll across to ask price of cheapest seats and find the melancholy word "Relâche." It is, of course, still Monday.

**Oct. 1**      Whether we leave to-day is still uncertain. We were  
**Tuesday.**    promised two seats on a big Pan-African liner leaving at  
                 noon to-day. The tickets would be at our *hôtel* in the  
 course of yesterday evening. Directors-in-chief swore this on the  
 heads of their infants. *No tickets arrived.* But then I didn't really  
 expect them to. The air-liner? I don't suppose that has arrived  
 either. I have one piece of consolation. Even in this nightmare  
 country it can't be Monday again for another week.

10.0. News that the air-liner has arrived.

10.15. Tickets to hand.

10.30. The taxi appears on time, and while it loads I spend our  
 last remaining francs on a leather belt for the adorable and inde-  
 fatigable Cynthia, who types this.

11.30. We make Le Bourget after a hair-raising drive in which  
 157 pedestrians nearly lose their lives.

12.0. Willie produces a thousand francs I didn't know he had,  
 which means ham sandwiches and a bottle of champagne.

12.40. We're off, and the fever called waiting is ended at last.

1.15. "The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls."

1.50. Croydon. The first words I see breathe the spirit of  
 England, Home, Beauty, and Dr Johnson. They are "Barclay  
 Perkins, Ltd."

**Oct. 2**      Found this letter from George Lyttelton awaiting me :  
**Wednesday.**

*Finndale House  
 Grundisburgh  
 Suffolk*

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

I was delighted to hear from you again and to see that the  
 steady slide of civilisation into the abyss has in no way dimmed  
 "the fire that in your heart resides." (What a poor verb that is!)  
 I hope you had a good birthday. I would have sent you a present,  
 but I have a notion that unless something original turns up you  
 have no great taste for such. I sent you a book once, and it took  
 you some weeks to forgive me! I cannot step into your brother  
 Edward's shoes, but it might give you a moment's pleasure to know  
 that in East Bergholt church there is a small memorial to one  
 John Mattinson, who in the eighteenth century was "for eleven  
 years a beloved schoolmaster in this parish, but was then un-  
 fortunately shott." And then, as Carlyle says, "impenetrable  
 Time-Curtains rush down," and no one will ever know what lay  
 behind that tantalising adverb.

How you must suffer under sub-editors—as under printers! I  
 suppose they are always in a hurry. Once in an iron-hard summer  
 (were there ever such things?) I wrote an account of a cricket

match and mentioned that the wicket took many of the batsmen by surprise. The sub-editor gave me the heading: "A sticky wicket at Lord's." There hadn't been a drop of rain for weeks. And now in one of the reputedly driest corners of England it rains at least every other day, and has done since June. We are all very harvest-minded these days, and do a lot of head-shaking over laid barley, etc. The silver lining to my personal cloud is that all the rain has made my garden a lovesome thing, God wot; which, I am sure you agree with me, is the most nauseating line in English poetry. In fact, I believe you added 'Godwottery' to the language, didn't you? Why wasn't my old colleague of Clifton fortunately shott before writing it, and what *was* "Q" thinking of when he let it into the *Oxford Book*? By the way, I have to set a paper shortly on *Lear*, and I want some really original question. I am sure you could think of several, but am *not* sure they would be printable! Hazlitt doesn't help. Surely a good deal of his *Characters of S.'s Plays* is surprisingly commonplace. Where do you find the extremely subtle and pointed remarks of his that you quote? "The concluding events are sad, painfully sad, but their pathos is extreme," stirs neither heart nor mind, about *Lear*. Perhaps Miss Walker had been particularly standoffish that day. Are you quite fair in calling her a *slut*, as you do in *Ego 6*? Wasn't she rather flattered and frightened and very cold and made of rather cheap material? Hazlitt, unshaved, and looking, in a rage, "like one of M. Angelo's devils," would be too much for most landladies' daughters. I have just been reading in (no one could read through) *Born under Saturn*, by Miss Maclean. I expect you know it. Isn't it much too long and every episode overhandled? Some women write so *portentously*. That Keswick episode is led up to as if it was an exploit of some super-Jack-the-Ripper.

That selection of Fry's is very interesting. Ranji is always to him what Sarah B. is to you. But I always wonder on what grounds Hobbs is not put right at the top. He was a superb artist, could score at any pace on either side of any wicket against any bowling; he had the best average in every series of Test Matches he played in after 1909 except two, and then his average was 68 and 50. What more could anyone do or has anyone done? But the fact must be faced that C. B. F. knows more about the art of batting than I do. Do you know him well? He must be great fun.

This was all written yesterday, and this morning I opened *Ego 6* in bed, and at once came on what you say of *Born under Saturn*. I ought to have known that you had read every word of it. How on earth could Hazlitt have said on his deathbed, "Well, I have had a happy life"? I suppose the hypersensitive have many compensations. They can forget debts, unpopularity, nagging wives, dyspepsia, and even sub-editors the moment that stellar and undiminshable something which is greatness comes their way.

This is true of you too, though you have more skins than H. Is your face ever wrenched and twisted and unrecognisable from rage ? Have you ever seen the Ivy emptying before your eyes ?

I must stop. Don't forget that on Wednesday you must drink twenty-seven memorial cups of tea. It is a grim thought that the other Bolt Court luxuries—veal pie and rice pudding—are in 1946 unprocurable.

Yours ever,

GEORGE LYTTTELTON

*Oct. 8* Sat next to Eddie Marsh at to-night's revival of *Our Thursday. Betters*. Eddie now looks like some serene baby ; his eyebrows have lost their truculence, and he has that look—Plum Warner has it too—which I suspect comes to good men when they grow old. (I see no trace of it in the mirror when I shave !) Went into Willie Maugham's box in the second interval, and told him his play stood up perfectly to my recollection of it. He seemed pleased. Whether it will stand up to our young playgoers' expectations is another matter. The old piece, for all its wit, was a castigation, and who castigates what to-day ? In Maugham's theatre social enormity still existed and carried its penalties ; it still exists, but the modern name for it is " rather fun," while non-transgressors are " drears." I remember that at the first performance the audience was almost as much shocked as the young girl at the goings on in the Grayston summer-house ; the young people of to-day think that goings on are what summer-houses are for. Cecil Beaton's scenery, as usual, reminded me of Pinero's French governess—" overgowned and overhatted." The acting goodish, but not *right*. Turning up my notice of twenty-three years ago, I find :

The play stands or falls by the two women. As Lady George Grayston, Miss Margaret Bannerman is quite ravishingly good, continually calling to mind Woodley's remark in the Henry James story : " Here comes a great celebrity—Lady Beatrice Bellevue. She's awfully fast ; see what little steps she takes." Miss Bannerman has acquired a wonderful carriage of the head—half the drawings by Charles Dana Gibson, so popular a few years ago, and half Herkomer's idea of the *maintien* of great ladies. She exhibits a very perfect sense of well-bred comedy, and makes not the smallest concession to any kind of *bourgeois* decency. There is so much sparkle about her performance that whenever she appears it is as though the lights in the theatre have suddenly gone up. Constance Collier, as her *vis-à-vis*, was richly comic. She trailed behind her clouds of the pork-packing business, yet wore her clothes and her manners with an air. She was, you felt, vulgar only of

soul. Her archness, her fatuousness, the ridiculousness of the Duchess's passionate forties was a joy.

Dorothy Dickson to-night had none of that quality of pure stone which Margaret Bannerman achieved, and got no nearer to it than angelica, that pretty Christmas sweetmeat. Her famous curtain line in the second act—"You damned fool, I told you it was too risky!"—fell quite flat. Nuna Davey did well, but the part needs Constance Collier's contralto preposterousness, rich, snuffing, and absurd, and there just aren't two Constance Colliers. Some little time ago I proposed a revival of this play to Coral Browne on condition that she could get Alfred Drayton for his old part of the befooled millionaire. George Woodbridge couldn't have done better, and he delivered the famous "Slut!" with tremendous effect. But I longed for Drayton's bald cranium, and the way it used to glow first with doting and then with fury. But, again, there aren't two Draytons.

*Oct. 4 Friday.* I shall be in trouble with Hamish Hamilton to-morrow when he reads my review of Bemelmans' *The Blue Danube*. Bemelmans is said to be a great wit. *The New Statesman* likens him to the Marx Brothers. *The Listener* is reminded of Tchekhov. Jack Priestley finds him "engrossing and convincing." Ralph Straus holds him to be "Southwindish." *Sphere* and *Tatler* fall over each other in admiration, one finding the brilliance of O. Henry, while the other talks of "poetic majesty." My own view of Bemelmans' latest book is that it is humourless, jokeless, unwitty, and unfunny. On the other hand, the author's drawings are pure genius, and I shall recommend *D.E.* readers to retain these and throw away the letterpress.

*Oct. 5 Saturday.* The Trocadero celebrations were charmingly carried out. Owing to illness, professional engagements, and jewel robberies my party dwindled considerably—from twenty guests to four. Let me say that the Countess of Dudley, Vesta Tilley, Bea Lillie, Hermione Gingold, Harry Kendall, George Robey and Charlie Cochran with their missuses, George Graves, Ivor Novello, Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge, Dorothy Ward, Noel Coward, and Gladys Calthrop "brillaient par leur absence." However, we managed to be gay, "we" being Dorothy Hyson, so pretty that one could eat her, Gwen Chenhalls in her best Molyneux, Michael Shepley, and Wally Crisham. Lovely food and lots of champagne—I hold three bottles among five persons to be 'lots.' The talk turning

on titles and honours, I told them something George Mair once said :  
 " People like us feel we can get the O.M. any old time. What you  
 and I want, James, is a knighthood ! "

Oct. 6 Letter to George Lyttelton :  
 Sunday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
 Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

No, I haven't any good poser about *Lear*. Unless it is : Mention in the whole of dramatic literature a greater gumph than Cordelia.  
*Answer* : There isn't one. By the way, do you know the test for a great *Lear* ? It is this. Do you instantly recognise who it is that enters " fantastically dressed with wild flowers " ? We have not seen *Lear* since the " anatomize Regan " scene in the hovel (Act III, Sc. 6), and here we are (Act IV, Sc. 6) on the cliffs at Dover. In the interval we have had the putting out of Gloucester's eyes, the Grand Guignolism of which has for the moment taken me out of *Lear*'s world so that I have to switch my mind back. And I am conscious of the switching ; it takes me at least the tenth part of a second before I recognise the strange old gentleman now coming on the stage. I have never yet seen a *Lear* who bridged the gap to perfection, making it seem that there has been no gap. Similarly all *Macbeths* have to begin again after the scene in England and *Macduff's* " All my pretty ones ? " Shakespeare doesn't make this mistake in *Hamlet* ; nobody has ever had to ask himself who the gentle figure is entering to the clowns in the graveyard.

You ask me where in Hazlitt I find my good things. No, *not* in the *Characters*, which I find enormously overrated. The great mine is *A View of the English Stage*. But there is a lesser mine entitled *Essays on the Acted Drama in London*. The *View* runs from January 1814 to June 1817, beginning with the famous discovery of Kean and ending with the retirement of Kemble. The *Essays* are ten in number, one for each month in the year 1820. October is missing, and the November number, being by another hand, is not given. (All of this is to be found in Vol. VIII of Dent's complete edition.) Here is a bit out of the essay for June :

" The passion in *Othello* pours along, so to speak, like a river, torments itself in restless eddies, or is hurled from its dizzy height, like a sounding cataract. That in *Lear* is more like a sea, swelling, chafing, raging, without bound, without hope, without beacon, or anchor. Torn from the hold of his affections and fixed purposes, he floats a mighty wreck in the wide world of sorrows. *Othello's* causes of complaint are more distinct and pointed, and he has a desperate, a maddening remedy for them in his revenge. But *Lear's* injuries are without provocation, and admit of no alleviation



or atonement. They are strange, bewildering, overwhelming : they wrench asunder, and stun the whole frame : they 'accumulate horrors on horror's head,' and yet leave the mind impotent of resources, cut off, proscribed, anathematised from the common hope of good to itself, or ill to others,—amazed at its own situation, but unable to avert it, scarce daring to look at, or to weep over it. The action of the mind, however, under this load of disabling circumstances, is brought out in the play in the most masterly and triumphant manner : it staggers under them, but it does not yield. The character is cemented of human strength and human weaknesses (the firmer for the mixture) :—abandoned of fortune, of nature, of reason, and without any energy of purpose, or power of action left,—with the grounds of all hope and comfort failing under it,—but sustained, reared to a majestic height out of the yawning abyss, by the force of the affections, the imagination, and the cords of the human heart—it stands a proud monument, in the gap of nature, over barbarous cruelty and filial ingratitude."

The *Dramatic Essays* are all too few for me. The last page but one of the last essay contains my favourite bit in all W. H.

"Macready has talents and a magnificent voice, but he is, I fear, too improving an actor to be a man of genius. That little ill-looking vagabond Kean never improved in any thing. In some things he could not, and in others he would not."

Which shows what an ass Carlyle was with his stuff about genius and "transcendent capacity of taking trouble." Transcendent tosh ! I hope all this has not been too heavy going for you. Let me lighten it. Have you ever had dealings with a *conversational* dentist ? One who says, "Did you have fine [pyrotechnics with forceps] weather in the South of France ?"

Ever,

JAMES AGATE

Oct. 7 Letter to Kenneth P. Tynan, who asks me to explain to  
Monday. Cherwell, of which he is the Editor. why I detested  
Oxford :

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR K. P. T.,

My E.P.T., plus my Lancashire upbringing, prevents me from doing owt for nowt. Besides, I didn't detest Oxford. I was prepared to adore it very much, as Jude was prepared to adore Christminster. (Was it ?) But I was too obscure for that city, which

ignored me. For which I have not forgiven it, and shall not till the day it offers me that honorary degree. And then we'll see whether he snubs best who snubs last.

Ever,

J. A.

*Oct. 8* Spent the morning writing an article on Principal Boys.  
*Tuesday.* The first principal boy I ever saw was Harriet Vernon.

She wore black tights and had the air of a battleship. The date must have been round about the middle 'eighties, and I remember the low comedian in the pantomime turning a statue of Mr Gladstone round and round. Harriet said, "You can turn him round as often as you like, but you'll never make him Dizzy." Maggie Duggan was a very pretty woman. Pretty in the Victorian, ladylike sense. She was not common, or pert, or smart, and she had the one thing that the Wests, Grables, Bacalls, and all the modern breed of husky hyenas would give their larynxes to have—charm. Maggie belonged to the era of Mrs Langtry. She brought on to the stage an atmosphere of guilty splendour which included heirs apparent, racehorses, and bottled stout. The last of the great Principal Boys was Queenie Leighton. Queenie's best song was "The Automobile Honeymoon," with words and music by Harry B. Norris. And here is the refrain :

Wedding bells with their ding, dong, dinging,  
Little birds with their sing, song, singing,  
Tell you 'tis the wedding day of Miranda and her fiancé !  
The wedding trip they will not take by boat or  
Train ; they mean to try a tour by motor ;  
They left this afternoon for an automobile honeymoon.

Fix the date when automobiles first became a feasible mode of locomotion and you get the date of Queenie's pantomime song. My guess is 1902, because it was in that summer, walking in the English Lakes, that I had to climb up a bank to avoid a snorting dragon coming round a bend of the road at the terrifying speed of some twelve miles an hour.

Lunch with Jock to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of his joining me. The other guest was Gerald Barry, now Jock's editor (*News Chronicle*), and for whom, when he was editor of the *Saturday Review*, Jock wrote his first article. Naturally a lot of the talk was about the past. Gerald recalled how my first serving-man, counsellor, and friend, Freddie Webster, brought a bottle of port to table saying, "I 'aven't shook it because of the sentiment." G. B. also told us about a Dutch journalist who had asked Clemenceau his opinion of Pétain.

Clemenceau replied, " He is an immortal. He has no heart, no brain, and no guts. How can a man like that die ? " Went with Jock to the Curzon afterwards to see a revival of *La Femme du Boulanger* with Raimu. Equally amused and touched.

In the meantime here is *Winged Words*, No. 18 :

To enjoy Rossini one needs only youth ; to know Chopin one must have suffered either an incomplete schoolboy love-affair or a bad bout of toothache. . . .

Henry Treece, " *How I See Apocalypse* "

Oct. 9            The editor of a theatrical magazine having asked which  
Wednesday.    I consider the better actor, Olivier or Gielgud, I sent  
him this letter :

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR SIR,

Many years ago I asked my ancient caddie at St Andrews which was the better golfer, young Tom Morris or Bobby Jones. He looked at me distastefully and said, " Baith o' them played pairfect gowf ! "

Yours faithfully,

JAMES AGATE

Lunched with Bertie van Thal, who asked whether he should publish a translation of Marcel Boulestin's *A Londres, naguère*. 'Phoned him later in the afternoon, " Yes, if the translator can reproduce M. B.'s style, which is amusing, often *chichi*, and always *très snob* " :

J'ai dit que les nègres étaient fort recherchés dans le privé. Naturellement, on les invita à ces fameuses *parties* ; on se les disputa. Je conduisais une nuit Mrs L. d'une soirée à une autre. Sur le trottoir elle aperçut un nègre ; elle se pencha par la portière, les bras tendus, criant : *Oh ! boy ! . . .* C'est à elle qu'arriva une aventure qui fit quelque bruit dans Chelsea et Bloomsbury. Elle avait à un moment une " affaire de cœur," comme l'on dit, avec un des acteurs nègres des *Black Birds* ; la femme de celui-ci, danseuse dans la troupe, le sut et, une après-midi, les surprit dans l'appartement de Mrs L. D'où explication violente, cris, coups, tandis que les passants contemplaient avec étonnement, sur le balcon un nègre terrifié qui cherchait à s'enfuir. Il était vêtu d'une chemise et d'un chapeau melon.

Some delightful misprints : Evelyn Waugh ; J. K. Chesterton, Olive Bell (the art critic), Winifred Holtly, Damon Rumyon, *The*

*Jorsyte Saga*, Hounddisch. Poor Marcel ! " The Gestapo got him," said Bertie, " but fortunately he managed to commit suicide."

Two tea-time callers. Edgar Lustgarten, to say that he submitted his first book to Curtis Brown, the agent, five days ago and signed the contract with Eyre and Spottiswoode yesterday. The other visitor was my young friend John Compton, who has neglected me somewhat lately, scoring 500 runs up and down the country in 25 innings, of which he is inordinately proud, and taking 102 wickets at a cost of 10 runs apiece, which he thinks is poor.

Oct. 10            The wind of inspiration has blown my way but once.  
Thursday.        This was when I set down Ellen Terry for Gertrude in an ideal casting of *Hamlet*. This game of imaginary casts grows upon one ; it is habit-forming, and one should beware of it. But there are times when it is useful and helps one to get through an evening. It helped me through to-night. How would one ideally cast *Dombey and Son* ? For Dombey I think first of John. But has Mr G. quite the weight and his voice the sonority ? Wherefore I pass him over in favour of Cedric Hardwicke, who would be required to convey Dombey's Macreadyisms in his best Wimpole Street manner. Major Bagstock ? I suggest Frederick Lloyd, so good an actor that he would have no trouble with this monstrous sycophant and toad-eater. Solomon Gills ? Anybody. Mr Carker ? Anybody with teeth. Walter Gay ? Any one of our colourless young leading actors. Mr Toots ? Here comes a piece of casting about which there is no inspiration because it is obvious to anyone with two eyes in his head. Or even one eye.

Toots is what none of Dickens's dignified characters are, in the most serious sense, a true lover. He is the twin of Romeo. He has passion, humility, self-knowledge, a mind lifted into all magnanimous thoughts, everything that goes with the best kind of romantic love.

Thus Chesterton. Well, and who is the actor for this " holy fool " ? Alec Guinness. For Mrs Chick I would have Marian Spencer. For Miss Tox, Gillian Lind, who did wonders with Miss Bates. For Susan Nipper, Megs Jenkins. Mrs Skewton presents something of a difficulty ; the actress must not be old, but able to suggest infinite eld. Edith Evans would have enormous fun with the part, but she is to play another Cleopatra presently, and one is enough. What about Cathleen Nesbitt to protest that Nature intended her for an Arcadian ? Florence doesn't matter, and Edith obviously calls for Eileen Herlie. The

reason I have left Captain Cuttle for the end ? Because his enactor to-night couldn't have been bettered, and I should have no hesitation in keeping him in my ideal cast. His name is Frederick Ross, and he is, if not an old actor, then an actor of the old school. In other words, he is *an actor*. If I have not cast Paul, or Mrs Pipchin, or Dr Blimber it is because they did not occur in to-night's play, which was hardly a play at all. But for my little game I don't think I could have got through the evening.

Oct. 11      John Mason Brown has a passage in his new book, *Seeing Friday*.      *Things*, which unquiets me :

I doubt if in the whole history of the stage any of its more distinguished critical servitors have written about it for so many years with such sustained high spirits and intelligence as Mr Nathan has done. Shaw, who as a reviewer was responsible for the best dramatic criticism ever to have provoked the stage or to have been provoked by it, rebelled at the end of three and a half years at being the theatre's slave. "It has tethered me," he groaned in his valedictory, "to the mile radius of foul and sooty air which has its centre in the Strand, as a goat is tethered in the little circle of cropped and trampled grass that makes the meadow ashamed." Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* consumed less than two years of his life. Beerbohm, "the incomparable Max," could tolerate only twelve years lived in the dread of those Thursdays, ever blackened as they were by the preparation of his critical copy. William Archer sat in judgment for more than thirty years. But he was a solemn judge—and a tired one towards the end. Woollcott's enchanted aisles lost their nightly enchantment for him after fourteen seasons. Clement Scott in England and William Winter and J. Ranken Towse in this country may have thundered about the stage for fifty or sixty years, but they were men who had died long before death overtook them.

Have I died without knowing it ? Seven years with the *Manchester Guardian*, two with the *Saturday Review*, and twenty-three with the *Sunday Times*—thirty-two years in all. Or am I just tired ? There must be some reason why I didn't find Sid Field very funny last night in *Piccadilly Hayride*. Can it be that he wasn't very funny ? In his first scene he appeared as Shakespeare's King John, modern style, asking why the Malmsey tastes queer and being told that it comes from the butt his brother Clarence was drowned in three weeks ago. As bad joking as it is history. There was a Frenchman with a duck and three women contortionists who contorted first and sang afterwards. And, of course, a ballet, which to me was boring, and, as Wilde's Lady Stutfield would say, quite, quite meaningless. But then

I shouldn't understand the plot of any ballet if it were explained to me in letters a foot high on the backs of sandwich-men.

*Oct. 12* Bertie van Thal and I have invented a jargon which  
*Saturday.* is entirely crazy. Here is this morning's telephone conversation :

BERTIE. Bon jour, jeune homme. Lunchen Sie ?

J. A. Danke sehr. Beaucoup plaisir. Où ?

BERTIE. Au Lierre.

J. A. Entendu. Um wieviel heure ?

BERTIE. Two sharp !

*Oct. 18* Letter to George Harrap :  
*Sunday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR GEORGE,

Will I write something for the *House Notes* you are thinking of reviving ? Of course I will. But first let me tell you a little story about a dry old stick of my acquaintance who was asked whether he played contract bridge. He replied, "I do not, but I know more about the game than most of the people who do." That is exactly my attitude to publishing. Here are some of the things I would insist on if I were a publisher :

1. I should employ a clever young man with seventeen degrees and a knowledge of at least six languages, including English, to proof-read my firm's books *after they had been published*, and keep a file reference to see that the mistakes did not occur in subsequent editions. Yesterday in the umpteenth reprinting of Wells's *Mr Polly* I found "Ain't the old woman meau nt ?" Work that one out !

2. I would divide my output into three categories : Good Books, Sentimental Slop, Sheer Muck. And I would separate the departments which produced them and wall them off with ship's bulkheads.

3. I should abolish the Art Department, or at most let it play about with the Slop and the Muck. The words "Art Department" mean "beautifying" the books, which even old Polonius knew to be an abomination. No sane man wants to see anything on a jacket except the title of the book and the name of the author, with perhaps the name of the publisher at the bottom *in very small print*. In my life I have had some forty battles about this with my nineteen publishers, all of which, with one exception, I have won. In the odd case the result was a brown glazed mess which looked as though somebody had been wrapping up inferior chocolate creams in acanthus leaves. I sent the usual twenty copies to friends, and

before doing so destroyed the wrapper. After which the W.C. wouldn't work for a month.

4. I should not allow advertisements of a book by B to disfigure the dust-cover of a book by A. I should hate to find any jacket of mine advertising *Tales of the Crimea* by some old walrus everybody thought had got himself sunk in the Black Sea way back in '55.

5. In the case of novels, I would have no synopsis of the plot printed on the jacket. Let the reviewers read the bloody thing!

6. I would abolish the preposterous habit of making accounts up to Lammastide, payable on the next Shrove Tuesday but one. This doesn't apply to you, my dear George, who have fed me as Elijah fed the ravens. Or was it the other way round, and did you and Walter come hopping with cheques in your eleemosynary beaks?

7. I would publish no novels of passion by frustrated spinsters angrily cluttering up Bath, Buxton, and Budleigh Salterton.

8. And seriously, I would bring out a library of masterpieces that had no luck at their first appearance. To be called "The Misfire Library." I could give you a dozen titles. *Si editorem requiris*, have a look round Queen Alexandra Mansions.

9. Lastly, I would hamstring anybody who suggested an illustrated edition of Jane Austen. Disembowel anybody who proposed a Dickens with any except the original illustrations. As for the fiend who suggested an *Alice* with drawings other than Tenniel's, my dear George, I would have his brains taken out, buttered, and given to the dog.

That's all, my dear fellow, except my love to you, Walter, and the staff.

Ever your

JAMES

Oct. 14      George Lyttelton writes :  
Monday.

*Finndale House  
Grundisburgh  
Suffolk*

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

Your delightful letter found me in bed with jaundice, and was as good a medicine as anything the chemist has since produced. Have you ever had the complaint? Don't. It has nothing to recommend it and lets go with the utmost reluctance while tingeing all one's thoughts with sourness. Shakespeare must have had it when he wrote *Timon*, and almost any contemporary poet when he writes anything.

What you say of Lear is immensely interesting, part and parcel as it is of one of your main theses—*viz.*, that physique and voice and personality (tho' I doubt if you use that loathsome word) must

all be right, and if they aren't no amount of cleverness and thought and prayer and fasting can bridge the gap. It is sickening that you were off duty when Olivier's *Lear* appeared. Have you seen it? I have never seen anyone get such ecstatic notices from the good critics. But most of us will not be satisfied that it is the biggest thing ever till the right voice has told us so. I am going to see it in about a month.

I am glad to be fortified by your opinion that Hazlitt's *Characters* is poor stuff. Almost anybody might have written it. I am fulfilling a vow I once made that if I was laid up I would again tackle *War and Peace*, which had baffled me a good many times. I believe it is to you one of those "books that are no books," as Lamb said. I don't wonder. I never see why any of the characters says or does what he or she does say or do, and the great battle scenes have, of course, been made pretty commonplace by events. The second part may perhaps revise my notions, but I still suspect it to be one of those mammoth books the labour of reading which is so enormous that the reader is convinced he has had a tremendous experience. A trivial and cynical view no doubt. That old genius definition of Carlyle's has always puzzled me, because the old man was very far from being a fool, yet the definition as applied to Napoleon or Shelley or Kean or Ranji is so obviously beside the mark. Does it perhaps apply only to the art of government? Wasn't it about Frederick he said it? Even so it is inadequate. Emerson's "that stellar and undiminishable something," though no definition, throws a shaft of light, and that I suspect is all we shall ever get.

A friend sends me the following which I hand on to you with confidence. From a girl's school story: "Sara's fourth ball was quite unlike its predecessors; it had a funny break-back which seemed to puzzle Joan. She cut at it a little uncertainly. It broke again in mid-air and skimmed her off-stump. The bails flew. Joan was out fourth ball. 'Well done, Sara,' Mrs Maxwell said, as though she could not help it." I think Bedser and Co. will need a tip or two from Sara. I suppose West Australia bat about as well as Hants. Did you see that the last four Australian batsmen are likely to be McCoo, Trade, Lindwa, and Toshak? Rather like the list of names on the screen before Hollywood does its worst. Forgive all this. But I had to answer yours.

Yours ever,

GEORGE LYTTTELTON

I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

Very sorry to hear about your jaundice. Yes, I had it some forty years ago, and sometimes think I have never quite recovered.



If you want a definition of genius you have come to the right shop for it. But before I tell you, hear a little story. Many years ago at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, Joynson Hicks was debating with Victor Grayson, the Socialist M.P. Grayson told his audience that he could not only define the meaning of every word he used, but derive it from its original sources. Whereupon a man at the back of the hall shouted, "Derive the word gramophone." "That's easy," said V. G. "Gramophone comes from two Greek words: *gramos*—'I speak'; *phonos*—'through a tin tube.'" And now for my definition. Genius is the ability to achieve masterpieces without trying.

You ask me about Olivier's Lear. The answer is: m'yes and m'no. First let me say that I gave it every chance, that I knocked off work at four o'clock to allow myself a rest. I thought Olivier began extraordinarily well, with just the right amount of testiness. A magnificent head, and everything royal about him. The whole subsequent performance brilliantly imagined and achieved. Mind working all the time and making one see things one had not previously noticed. For example, in the "loop'd and window'd raggedness" speech, at the line "O, I have ta'en too little care of this!" one sensed an unclouding of the mind and a return to the responsibilities of kingship. Yes, any amount of subtlety and intellectual appeal. But was I moved? Not so much as I ought to have been. Was it because of the echoes of the same actor's Justice Shallow? And shouldn't Olivier, knowing he was going to tackle the big thing, have let the lesser one alone? Couldn't he see that there were bound to be repercussions and overtones? Wouldn't a stupider actor have done better? Wasn't it a mistake, when Lear entered "crown'd with flowers," to make him run on and put us in mind of one of Jean Cadell's old maids in a night-gown? I have no doubt that mad old men do behave like that. But I think the *optique du théâtre* demands here not a skipping folly, but a loss of wit which is almost happy. That we ought to be reminded of Dowson's *To One in Bedlam*:

With delicate, mad hands, behind his sordid bars,  
Surely he hath his posies, which they tear and twine;  
Those scentless wisps of straw, that miserably line  
His strait, caged universe, whereat the dull world stares,

Pedant and pitiful. O, how his rapt gaze wars  
With their stupidity! Know they what dreams divine  
Lift his long, laughing reveries like enchanted wine,  
And make his melancholy germane to the stars?

And then I thought the voice too high-pitched. Lear is a bass that pipes treble in his old age; Olivier is a natural tenor verging upon alto. The actor chipped off every bit of the character—but took me out of my critical self not more than three times—in the "Terrors of the earth" speech, in the second half of the mad scene, and from the entrance with the body of Cordelia to the end. Here

the handling of the limp bundle as though it were the dummy certain dancers tie themselves to for a partner, the attempts at artificial respiration, the quiet at the end so that death took place without one's knowing the exact moment of passing—all this was masterly. Do you want it in a nutshell? Wolfitt's *Lear* is a ruined piece of nature; Olivier's is a picture of ruins most cunningly presented.

Then there's another matter. I have the conviction that Olivier is a comedian by instinct and a tragedian by art. He keeps his sense of fun under control in his tragic parts, but I can see him controlling it. Of his *Coriolanus* in 1938 I wrote: "I think, too, that he must resolve to discard that clowning which he probably adjudges to be mordancy. There is not much of it in the present performance, but what there is is wholly bad. For where it is used it turns into a naughty boy a figure whose dignity should be pauseless." And then I don't surrender to him as I did to Irving. (That there should be any coupling of the two names is in itself significant.) Olivier challenges me, and I take up the challenge. He bids me observe how well he is doing this bit of pathos, whereupon I consider and agree. I never stopped to consider whether, and to what extent, Irving was being pathetic. When I look at a watch it is to see the time, and not to admire the mechanism. I want an actor to tell me *Lear's* time of day, and Olivier doesn't. He bids me watch the wheels go round.

The rest of the cast was disappointing—all very clever and well meaning, but just not big enough. I was immensely disappointed with the Fool, for whom they had got the one actor I should have chosen in fifty years. The one player able to convey the dumb capacity for being hurt. And to babble while his heart is breaking. I should have said that there were two characters that Alec Guinness was born to play—Mr Toots and the Fool in *Lear*. So what do they do but chalk his face and make him stick on a putty nose, like Noni, the music-hall clown. The result was that he was forced to play throughout with the same unvarying mask, like an Edwardian beauty afraid that her enamel will crack. And why not Ralph Richardson for Kent?

And now to other things. I have decided that *Ego 9* shall be the last. My publishers say that if I deliver now what stuff I have got ready and the balance at the end of the year there's a chance that they may be able to publish on my seventieth birthday. E. V. Lucas said that one of the marks of a gentleman is never to show that he is tired. That's as may be. I am sure that one of the marks of an artist is not to let his work show signs of fatigue. I am very weary. Yesterday afternoon Gwen Chenhalls took me to Harold Holt's box at the Albert Hall. We arrived in time for my favourite piano concerto, Beethoven's C minor. This begins, as you know, with a long exposition by the orchestra. Half-way through this I fell asleep to wake only with the applause at the end, and not having heard a note of Pouishnoff. And this after a

lunch of monastic simplicity—meaning two double whiskies and an omelette. Now here's the point. In this state of tiredness some of my work must necessarily suffer. I am determined that it shan't be *Ego*, and by any code of fairness it mustn't be my papers. I am not overlooking the possibility of a postscript, to be published if and when my literary executors—horrid phrase—think fit. I might even call it *Postscript to Ego*, or *Letters from Grundisburgh*.

I hear that the latest cure for jaundice is a trip to town. Why not try it? Now, not in a month's time.

Ever,

JAMES AGATE

P.S. I have just come across this in Clifton Fadiman's *Reading I've Liked*:

"When Somerset Maugham prepares tripe, he practically puts a label on it stating its high percentage of adulteration. I find this a virtue. It makes his work so much more agreeable than the novels, for example, of Charles Morgan, which are not only tripe, but are rendered doubly unpalatable by the fact that Mr Morgan doesn't seem to know it."

What nonsense! Our Charles is magnificently unreadable, but he doesn't write tripe. If I had to use a culinary metaphor it would be the funeral baked meats served up to the sorrowing relatives of a dead duke. In the meantime I have started an anthology called *Reading I Haven't Liked*.

Oct. 15      On this matter of work and overwork. Yesterday I  
Tuesday.      brought up the total of words written by me since I joined  
the *Saturday Review* in 1921 to the staggering figure of  
seven millions. In figures, 7,000,000. Or just about double the  
number of words in Balzac's *La Comédie Humaine*. Now I am aware  
that the average reader has no idea of how much, say, 10,000 words is.  
Any more than I know how much 10,000 acres amounts to, whether  
it is a big estate or a small. Does Lord's cricket ground constitute  
one acre or six? I have no idea. Wherefore let the world know that  
seven million words is the length of one hundred average-sized novels.  
Twenty-one from forty-six leaves twenty-five. Meaning that for  
twenty-five years I have written at the length of four novels per year.  
Whaur's your Arnold Bennett noo?

When the cat's away . . . From the *Tatler* for October 9, D. B.  
Wyndham Lewis's article:

It is not generally known that Livingstone used a pseudonym for emergency purposes, such as being suddenly discovered by a bouncing chap like Stanley. Casting round for an alternative name suggestive of great, true, violet-like, illustrious modesty, Livingstone had just hit on the ideal one when Stanley burst through the Bush.

"Dr Livingstone, I presume?"

"My name is Agate. Good morning."

This put Stanley in a nice quandary, requiring two elephants and sixteen native bearers to pull him out.

Oct. 16 I have received the following from Neville Cardus :  
Wednesday.

Sydney

MY DEAR JAMES,

During the last twelve months I have sent you cables and/or letters of commiseration, of congratulation, of supplication. I have even sent you a book on cricket. But not a sign from you. There is the evidence of the *Sunday Times* that you are still in being, unless (and you are capable of it) you have arranged for a posthumous reign and dictatorship. Please put an end to a silence which is becoming dramatic. And tell dear old George Lyttelton that very few things in my life have given me more pleasure than to be called by him (p. 107, *Ego* 7) "the well-beloved Cardus."

You may be interested to hear that an American teacher of music has written to me from Fort Worth Conservatory of Music (Texas) saying of my *Ten Composers* that "I have read it through twice, and cannot honestly alter my opinion that it is *pure hogwash* in the worst possible tradition." . . . I have replied thanking him for his refreshing candour, and have concluded thus :

"*Ten Composers* is at present being translated into Swedish. Perhaps some day an American translation will be made of it, and then possibly you'll arrive at a more favourable opinion of my essays."

I hope you are well, and more than half-way through *Ego* for

There was no falling off in *Ego* 7 ; and it is a preposterous notion that any committee or council of candid friends should be given executive power over the future of the best bed-book since Boswell. I talk of you every week for hours amongst civilised people in Sydney ; they all of them, the whole three of them, send you affectionate greetings. I send you, as ever, my love, which, in spite of your indifference to it, will not be proticipated or denied.

NEVILLE

I have replied :

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR NEVILLE,

There's only one lunatic outside Bedlam, and that's me. I have—let me count them on my fingers—five books on the stocks at





the moment. *Ego 8*, which is to appear shortly ; *Ego 9*, which is five-sixths finished ; *The Contemporary Theatre, Around Cinemas, Second Series* ; and *Thus to Revisit . . .*, a collection of essays. I have three papers to keep going. I have to read the bloody books, see the bloody plays, and sit through the bloody films. I know no passage in the works of Shakespeare which moves me so much as this from *The Importance of Being Earnest* :

ALGERNON. What shall we do after dinner ? Go to a theatre ?

JACK. Oh, no ! I loathe listening.

ALGERNON. Well, let us go to the Club ?

JACK. Oh, no ! I hate talking.

ALGERNON. Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten ?

JACK. Oh, no ! I can't bear looking at things. .

And you would make a letter-writer of me ! Don't you realise that my books are my letters to my friends ? Also, that if I had a beard it would be snow-white ? That I propel myself on my two legs only because bath-chairs are even more difficult to come by than perambulators ?

Besides, I have nothing to tell you, except that I love hearing from you and that I think Alban Berg's Violin Concerto is filth. If this reaches you in time for the Test Matches give our side a little chirp for me.

Ever,

JIMMIE

Oct. 17 Jolly party last night at Lady Juliet Duff's. Lady  
Thursday. Birkenhead, Willie Maugham, Arthur Macrae, Simon  
Carnes. Willie was in as good form as my chattering  
would allow him to be. He said of Kipling, " To the end he had the  
mind of a fifth-form boy at a second-rate school. He dined with me  
on the day after Gene Tunney beat Jack Dempsey : ' Gene is a  
white man.' I made a bet with myself that his next two words would  
be ' pukka sahib.' They were." I was a fool to talk so much. A  
wise man would have been stimulated to listen, not to jabber.

The post brings this :

DEAR MR AGATE,

It was with a sense of despair that I read your criticism of *Dombey and Son* in the *Sunday Times* this morning.

I am sorry you were so bored with the play. I too was very bored with the lengthy column you devoted to showing off your doubtless brilliant powers as a casting director. Can you honestly say that you gave an intelligent, constructive criticism, which the ordinary theatre-going public look for in the *Sunday Times* ? Surely, when so much is said these days about the encouragement of Art in Britain, and when we are so often treated to so many

meaningless plays in the West End, an unpretentious attempt to present *Scenes from Dombey and Son* should at least be given a helpful criticism, and not merely ridiculed and dismissed with contempt.

Would it not have been to every one's advantage if you had used your great knowledge of the theatre to give us at least an intelligent account of the play, with its good and bad points, instead of using your column for a display of West End snobbery? If, as you say, you find your work so tedious at times that you have to invent a "little game" to help you through, I suggest you have spent too long in the atmosphere of the theatre, and I think it might be a good idea if you made way for a younger, keener mind, who will give us some sound constructive criticisms, to help us in our choice of plays, and our judgment of them.

I am not an actress: I work in a big London hospital. Therefore I am not speaking from a professional, but a reader's point of view. Neither have I seen the play, so I am not defending the cast or the author. I am merely very disappointed in you as a critic. However tedious the work of an ordinary citizen, boredom is not an excuse for making it a game.

I shall be interested to see whether you will have this letter printed, and what your reply will be.

To which I answered:

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR MADAM,

Your letter raises a point of considerable interest.

I must ask you to realise that nothing can be done, constructively, about a play that is already written. What is done cannot be undone, as a lady in one of Shakespeare's plays remarks. Hints which will prove helpful to the author in his or her next attempt? *I do not want to help anybody to dramatise Dickens's novels.* The thing cannot be done and should not be attempted, even with an ideal cast.

To help you to choose your plays? Dear lady, you have the daily papers. If you are an intelligent reader, as, of course, you are, you will have said to yourself, "Why does a conscientious critic like James Agate go out of his way to say nothing about this production?" And then, if you are very intelligent, you have said to yourself, "Because anything he could honestly say must be so damaging and hurtful that he preferred not to say it." And at once you knew whether to book for this play or not.

A dramatic critic has another function besides handing out tips about what to see and what to miss. This is to entertain his circle of readers. Some of my little circle have written to tell me that they were greatly amused by my "ideal" casting of *Dombey and Son* (though I still maintain it should never happen), and all of them



gathered that the venture in question was something to be kept away from.

Lastly I am going to take the trouble to copy out for you something a very great man wrote many years ago. This is it :

“ You must love these people [writers and critics] if you are to be among them. No ambition is of any use. They scorn your ambition. You must love them, and show your love in these two following ways. First, by a true desire to be taught by them, and to enter into their thoughts. To enter into theirs, observe ; not to find your own expressed by them. If the person who wrote the book is not wiser than you, you need not read it ; if he be, he will think differently from you in many respects. Very ready we are to say of a book, ‘ How good this is—that’s exactly what I think ! ’ But the right feeling is ‘ How strange that is ! I never thought of that before, and yet I see it is true ; or if I do not now, I hope I shall, some day.’ But whether thus submissively or not, at least be sure that you go to the author to get at *his* meaning, not to find yours.”

In other words when you read a dramatic critic that you think is worth reading look to see what he wants to tell you, and not what you want to be told.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES AGATE

*Oct. 18*      Audrey did not know what ‘ poetical ’ is, and I should  
*Friday.*      have no hesitation in telling her modern counterpart that poetical is what the fashioners of the modern verse drama are not. I know that there are poorish lines in Shakespeare. I am not greatly moved by such doggerel as, for example,

Hopeless and helpless doth Ægeon wend,  
But to procrastinate his lifeless end.

On the other hand I feel pretty certain that I shan’t see or hear any more of the old bore till the time comes to dive for my hat. Whereas when the soldier in Peter Yates’s *The Assassin* says,

I somehow feel that he will speak again,

I know, by gosh, that John Wilkes Booth is only just getting steam up. Surely, prose and not verse is the proper medium for such sentiments as

You take a mean advantage of my leg  
and

It’s near Port-Royal in Virginia.

I don’t know that I am particularly interested in the reasons which made Booth do what he did. But if I am, then the interest is factual and not poetical. I want to hear the evidence of the actors who

played with him as to whether, in their opinion, he was sane or mad. I want to hear a summary of the great mass of evidence tending to show that Booth was the tool of those early racketeers who disapproved of Lincoln's cleaning-up operations. What I do not want to hear are this third-rate actor's speculations on the nature of death and the hereafter. Booth may have been sane. He may have been acting out of his own will and disposition. He may have thought himself the avenger of the martyred South. All well and good. But he committed one of the foulest crimes in history, and was rightly shot for it. To which I say Amen. We already have one play about Brutus and another about Hamlet, and as far as I am concerned there is no room for another play about Lincoln even if it pretends to be about Booth. Nor for any highbrow tosh in which young men in unison exhort the statue and spirit of Lincoln to fulfil and animate what follows. And when that statue which one had supposed to be marble, or at least plaster, nods its head—why, then, as the poet says, I “to nothingness do sink.” And I dissent absolutely and *in toto* from the view that Lincoln owes his immortality to a crazy actor, and that if he had not been murdered he would have declined to a nonentity. Last night's play began and ended when the old negro said to Booth, “You gets shot, you'se dead. When Mr Lincoln gets shot he ain't dead at all.”

Oct. 19           “Bring forth men-children only.” Yes, but suppose  
Saturday.       the actress doesn't look as though she could produce  
any kind of child. Say, one of our modern teeny-weenies. Lady Macbeths should be like brood mares—‘wealthy,’ in horse language, with room to carry a foal. “I have given suck.” Then take Beatrice. I shall never forget Ellen Terry's entrance at the words

For look where Beatrice, like a lapwing, runs  
Close by the ground.

I can see her now in a full, wide, and, I think, green silk skirt sewn with pearls. How she filled the whole stage and sailed to the bower in part like a bird, but in part, too, like a modern aeroplane making a perfect landing. This Beatrice was a great lady; the character is not to be essayed by actresses who at best are little ladies. A pert Rosalind is an abomination; a Viola about whom there is a smack of the teashop is a horror! The same with the men. What I am trying to say is that when I know that a player cannot fill a great rôle I do my best to avoid seeing him fail. It is my duty to attend the per-

formance and point out the faults that the player may mend them ? But I am talking of faults that are ineradicable and shortcomings that can never be made up. If an actor is common he cannot play Hamlet, and if he lacks virility he will not be Othello. And twenty columns in the *Sunday Times* won't help him. Commonness cannot be put off, or virility put on. My duty to the public ? The public can't be taught and won't believe. Why should I bother to tell readers that Ellen Terry could play Beatrice and little Miss Periwinkle can't ? All that happens is an avalanche of letters informing me that I am a foolish, fond old man. It is the public who are the fools. Did my recollections of George Robey prevent me from acclaiming Sid Field ? When another Ellen Terry happens—another actress whose talent is as great in to-morrow's way as Ellen's was in yesterday's—I shall know her.

*Oct. 20*      Delayed nerves ? The result of not panicking in France  
*Sunday.*      is two nightmares. In the first I am back again in Cannes, without Willie, penniless and having lost my luggage. I wake up from this in a cold sweat. In the other I am sitting on the top of an aeroplane, holding on with both hands, and nothing to hold on to. Suddenly the mass of Mont Blanc rises in front, less than a hundred feet away, and we must crash. At this moment the delectable Cynthia, who is my pilot, turns round and with a dazzling smile says, " It's the first time I've driven one of these things ! " I wake up screaming.

Lady Alexander, who died to-day, was a remarkable figure. She had great charm, and at the age of eighty looked like a white French poodle. There was not an inch of her that did not gleam or shake or tinkle. She wore powder and patches to the last.

*Oct. 21*      This week being the centenary of the birth of C. P. Scott,  
*Monday.*      my thoughts naturally turn to the *Manchester Guardian*. I like to think that I joined the *M.G.* in its high and palmy days, and sometimes, when I'm feeling very vain, to believe that I made part of them. They were a wonderful team in 1906—C. E. Montague, Allan Monkhouse, Herbert Sidebotham, Ernest Newman, and, in London, James Bone. George Mair came a little later. Forty years ago Manchester had three theatres, the Royal, the Princes, and the just opening Gaiety. I was called in to help Montague and Monkhouse, and there we were in our splendour every Tuesday morning with the best part of a column each. Montague would write

me a little note saying that he was selfish enough to want to see Jane Hading at the Princes, and that he had asked Monkhouse to deal with the new Galsworthy at the Gaiety. Would I mind covering the Benson company in *The Merchant of Venice*? Yes, I spent two or three years covering this and that. Then Montague became a little tired, and Monkhouse was ill, and at the beginning of the First World War most of the dramatic criticism devolved upon me, with Mair as second string.

I have a great collection of unreprinted Montague in a buckram-bound newspaper-cutting book that has accompanied me in my peregrinations throughout forty years. And I want to ask: Why is not Montague republished? Shaw, Max, Walkley, Grein in their fullness, and too much of J. A. But, apart from the tiny *Dramatic Values*, no Montague. I would put him together myself except that a labour of love requires time, and I just can't go trotting off to Hendon, or wherever the *M.G.* keeps its files. Perhaps when I am eighty. . . .

*Oct. 22 Tuesday.* It is a commonplace that women bear pain better than men. What has not been decided is whether, as a lower organism, they feel pain less or have more courage to meet it. Moral courage, of course, women have; otherwise they would not be seen at the Ivy in hats that would make chimpanzees gibber and giraffes stampede. At this point Gwen Chenhalls rings me up:

J. A. Do women bear pain better than men?

GWEN. But of course.

J. A. Why?

GWEN. They have to. No man would put up with a woman who let out the screams a man does when he pricks his thumb.

But women possess another kind of courage—you can call it artistic intrepidity—meaning the quality of rushing in where the more stupid male would hesitate. Your woman novelist who has resided all her life in Bournemouth has no hesitation in describing the love-life of a horse-slaughterer in Chicago or the adolescent dreamings of a bull-fighter's apprentice. Men are not like this; I have been a novelist and I know. When I wrote about a shop-girl it was because I once kept a shop and there was a girl in it. Nothing would have induced me to say what that girl thought; I was content to set down what she did. But women writers will describe and differentiate between the agonies of an Alpine climber whose boot has come off, an air-pilot who suspects the damn' thing to be on fire, and a boxer hit below the belt. Whereas I, a mere male, would

hesitate to describe what it feels like to have purred two instead of plained three, and would not dare to hazard what goes on at Dorcas Meetings and Spelling Bees.

Our Dilys has been telling us that *Le Grand Jeu*, the new French film at the Academy, "has its share of Foreign Legion and other boloney." But what does Dilys know about the life of Foreign Légionnaires in Morocco? What can any woman, or any man who has not served in the Legion, know what does and what doesn't go on? The camels may have an inkling, but they won't tell. There is a line in Kipling's old poem that I'm very fond of, the line which tells me that "single men in barricks don't grow into plaster saints." I am perfectly certain that what road-makers in Morocco want after three months of road-making and occasional sniping is not a rock-bun and a reading of Edith Sitwell's poems. The maker of this film knows perfectly well what they want—plenty to drink and women with some go about them. This film has a scene in which the brothel-keeper in this wretched imitation of a town complains to the local trader about the non-arrival of the new batch of girls. He has paid Frs. 2000 a head, the troops are expected hourly, and why hasn't the Barcelona bunch arrived? I see no boloney about this; it seems to me that the brothel-keeper's attitude is strictly reasonable.

Dilys finds in this picture "passages of poetic realism." It is these which seem to me, as a mere man, to be boloney. Indeed, so strong in my mind is the association of modern poetry with boloney that in future I propose to talk of "boletic realism," just as, in another place, I shall write of "the Boletic Drama." What is sheer bunk in this film is the suggestion that a young crook who made away with over a million francs to keep his expensive doxy in a good temper should imagine, on the strength of a physical likeness, that the pathetic drab who has somehow got mixed up with the Barcelona consignment is the same woman. She has let her gold hair go back to brown. Good. She doesn't remember him? Yes, but that is explained by the bullet mark on her temple acquired in a moment of remorse when she sought to become shot. Embezzlers should have enough brains to know that doxies don't shoot, and if they do don't miss. But worse remains behind. The audience is led to believe what the young man believes. Jacques Feyder should know that while you may fool your characters to the top of your boletic bent you must never, never mislead your audience. I don't think I am ever going to take a wild fancy to Marie Bell, though she slogs through her dual rôle conscientiously enough. But to Françoise Rosay, who has a very large and important

secondary rôle, I surrender entirely. I should surrender if they showed the film the other way up. Which, if it had been given at the Film Festival at Cannes, is doubtless what would have happened.

Oct. 28            " I thowt a said whot a owt to a' said an' I coom'd  
*Wednesday.*    awaäy." But dramatic critics are not Northern  
                      Farmers, old style or new. They may think a play-  
 wright is saying what he ought to say, and they may even think he  
 finished saying it a couple of hours ago—but they cannot come away.  
 Hugo Bastin, a fading film-star, having decided in 1938 that the post-  
 War world was not fit to live in, bought an island in the Pacific  
 and retired to it with his claret, cigars, first editions, and three  
 other *fainéants*—a thug, a professor, and a terrified Jew. He also  
 took with him his wife, and what I believe is technically called a  
 'lovely,' the wife observing that he would want a fresh face to look  
 at occasionally. Quantities of gowns and dressing-gowns, and a  
 Chinese staff big enough to keep the place as spick as any villa at  
 Cannes. The author of *Away from it All* at the Embassy last night  
 asked us to presume that in 1946 none of the party knew of the Second  
 World War, and that all heard of it first from an airman and his girl,  
 who, having run out of petrol, had made a forced landing on Bastin's  
 beach. During the hours that followed I thought of those amusing  
 times in the Pacific at the close of that eighteenth century about which  
 Bastin was always babbling. How Fletcher Christian and his eight  
 men of the *Bounty* sailed away from Otaheite to Pitcairn Island,  
 taking with them nine Otaheite wives and seven men to act as their  
 servants. How after a time the natives became jealous of the white  
 sailors and murdered them all except one—John Adams. How the  
 Otaheite widows rose up, drugged the Otaheite men and killed the  
 lot, with the result that John Adams became husband to the entire  
 female population. One wondered at what point Val Gielgud's thug  
 would liquidate the males on the island and become monarch of all  
 he surveyed. Alas that nothing of the sort happened! Nor was  
 there any word about the hell of having nothing to do for eight years  
 except drink claret and read Richardson's interminable novels. The  
 airman and his girl talked faintly of finding means of departure. This  
 was negatived by Bastin, who said that the publicity attendant on  
 his still being alive would be repugnant to his ex-film-star's sense of  
 delicacy. How did Bastin propose that they should all spend the  
 rest of Time? Just talking. What is to be remembered is that five-  
 sixths of any theatre audience has never indulged in abstract specula-

tion, six-sevenths has never thought at all, and seven-eighths only goes to a theatre once in a blue moon. Obviously to such an agglomeration philosophisings on the nature of war and peace will be wildly exciting when conducted in luxurious surroundings by smartly dinner-jacketed men and sumptuously dressed women. Whereas they can only be a crashing bore to the professional playgoer who spends nine-tenths of his time in the theatre and has had this play's conclusions rammed down his throat by every highbrow playwright ever since they made the wretched peace. Nice acting if you think talking is acting. But then before you can act you must have a play to act in, and I regard this as far better material for the radio than the stage.

*Oct. 24*                Suppose a poetry recital at which the reciter said, "The  
*Thursday.*        rainbow goes and comes, and the rose is lovely; the  
                         moon likes looking round an empty sky; water under  
the stars is a sight for sore eyes; sunshine is a good beginning; yet somehow I feel that things aren't as jolly as they used to be. That, ladies and gentlemen, is Wordsworth." Whereupon you would be justified, I think, in rising in your seat and saying in a loud voice, "No, it isn't!" There was not a moment during to-night's performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the New Theatre when I was not conscious of saying to myself in a small, silent voice, "This is not Rostand."

Montague has pointed out the special quality of Rostand's verse, the "accented artificiality," the "triumphant click of the French rhymes into their place," the "mannered daintiness," the "porcelain fragility," the "intimate preciousness of diction, which seems to co-opt the playgoer into a rather choice set of co-heirs of French literary and dramatic tradition and co-possessors of a kind of elegant bookishness." Another way of putting it might be that Rostand delights to create difficulties for himself, funambulist-wise.

The translation by Brian Hooker used at the Old Vic to-night is in lumbering blank verse, and if the translator never falls it is because he has given himself nothing to fall off. Anybody with an ear for French will realise the fun of

Que Montleury s'en aille,  
Ou bien je l'essorille et le désentripaille !

Whereas nobody with an ear for English will find much fun in

Fly, goose ! Shoo ! Take to your wings,  
Before I pluck your plumes, and draw your gorge !

If Cyrano's blood runs cold at the thought of an amputated comma it is because *virgule* is a jolly rhyme to *coagule*. "My blood curdles at the thought of altering a comma" is not the same thing.

But any translation stands or falls by the famous first-act speech about the Nose :

Par exemple, tenez :

Agressif : "Moi, monsieur, si j'avais un tel nez,  
Il faudrait sur le champ que je me l'amputasse !"

Amical : "Mais il doit tremper dans votre tasse :  
Pour boire, faites-vous fabriquer un hanap !"

Descriptif : "C'est un roc ! . . . c'est un pic . . . c'est un cap !  
Que dis-je, c'est un cap ? . . . C'est une péninsule !"

Curieux : "De quoi sert cette oblongue capsule ?  
D'écritoire, monsieur, ou de boîte à ciseaux ?"

Gracieux : "Aimez-vous à ce point les oiseaux  
Que paternellement vous vous préoccupez  
De tendre ce perchoir à leurs petites pattes ?"

Now compare to-night's translation :

For example, thus :—

Aggressive : I, sir, if that nose were mine;  
I'd have it amputated—on the spot !

Friendly : How do you drink with such a nose ?  
You ought to have a cup made specially.

Descriptive : 'Tis a rock—a crag—a cape—  
A cape ? say rather, a peninsula !

Inquisitive : What is that receptacle—  
A razor-case or a portfolio ?

Kindly : Ah, do you love the little birds  
So much that when they come and sing to you,  
You give them this to perch on ?

Even when the translator essays rhyme he does poorly. Think of the wonderful rhymes Cyrano found for *Gascogne*—*vergogne*, *bastogne*, *cigogne*, *vigogne*, *ivrogne*, *carogne*, *renfrogne*. The English translator, unable to find rhymes for "Gascoyne," substitutes "defenders," and then goes on to talk of "spenders," "contenders," "lenders," "sword-benders," "befrienders," "engenders," "pretenders." Not a patch on the original ! And so throughout the whole of the evening. Wordsworth's sense without Wordsworth's sound may be worth while. Rostand's isn't. Deprive him of his tinkle and he is nothing.

Is the play untranslatable then ? Well, that highly accomplished poet Humbert Wolfe failed, and the authors of the version used by Robert Loraine were so conscious of impossibility that they left out the Nose speech ! Cannot the thing, then, be done ? Yes, but perhaps not by any living poet. I think Austin Dobson might have achieved it on the lines of

With the coming of the crow's feet  
Goes the backward turn of beaux'-feet.



But for a Casabianca-like sense of duty Thursday night would have seen the backward turn of critics' feet.

Is the production good in an English way ? I just wouldn't know, any more than I should know whether a claret made at Stoke Newington is a good claret. Or whether a Chopin Ballade *with different notes* is still a good Chopin Ballade. The acting ? A lady was heard to say as we were going in, " The play must have *sabretache*. No actor who has not got *sabretache* can play *Cyrano*." Ralph Richardson has any amount of *sabretache*, but I doubt whether, even given a better equivalent of Rostand's words, he would have that for which the lady was fumbling—*panache*.

Oct. 25 Letter to George Lyttelton :  
Friday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

I shan't have my full say about *Cyrano* on Sunday owing to lack of space. Five Hazlitts would not be able to cram Rostand's play and an importantish political thing at the Embassy into one column which has also to accommodate Harold Hobson on Henry James at the Arts and something else at the Westminster, plus next week's Theatre Diary. *C'est gigantesque !* And there were so many things I wanted to say. Brian Hooker, who made his translation in 1928, appears to have had no feeling whatever for the original French. Listen to Rostand :

Eh bien ! toute ma vie est là :  
Pendant que je restais en bas, dans l'ombre noire,  
D'autres montaient cueillir le baiser de la gloire !  
C'est justice, et j'approuve au seuil de mon tombeau :  
Molière a du génie et Christian était beau !

Now read Hooker :

It was always so !  
While I stood in the darkness underneath,  
Others climbed up to win the applause—the kiss !—  
Well—that seems only justice—I still say,  
Even now, on the threshold of my tomb—  
" Molière has genius—Christian had good looks—"

Note how beautifully after the word *tombeau* Rostand's last line clicks into place, whereas in the English there is no clicking. And then I am conscious of a faint commonness about " Christian had good looks." It's the sort of thing one says about a young man behind a glove counter !

Then, again, compare

C'est vrai ! je n'avais pas terminé ma gazette :  
 . . . Et samedi, vingt-six, une heure avant diné,  
 Monsieur de Bergerac est mort assassiné.

with

I did not finish my Gazette--  
 Saturday, twenty-sixth : An hour or so  
 Before dinner, Monsieur de Bergerac  
 Died, foully murdered.

And then the ending :

Ah ! te voilà, toi, la Sottise !  
 —Je sais bien qu'à la fin vous me mettrez à bas ;

Hooker renders this :

Ah, you too, Vanity !  
 I knew you would overthrow me in the end—

What the hell has *Vanity* got to do with it ! It goes without saying that half of the cast pronounced Cyrano properly while the other half called him Cyrahno. But then, as somebody remarked, "It's no use trying to teach French to actors who can't speak English." That somebody is a rather important body, and I won't give away who it was. He also said, "I agree with you, my dear Agate. The difference between Rostand and Hooker is the difference between pinking a man with a rapier and hitting him over the head with a shovel." And I said, "*Missing* him with the shovel."  
 Yours ever,

JAMES AGATE

P.S. I reopen this because of a poem entitled *Of Silence* I have just come across in a highbrow magazine. Here is a stanza :

Silence loves rhythm ; and of wind walking on heather  
 The pause : the intermissions of the sea ;  
 And, I have found, lovers can make together  
 A better silence than the solitary.

I wonder whether the poet—one Hal Summers, by the way—knows the story of the two drummer-boys, waiters, or grooms who, at a queerish party in the 'nineties, sat by the door twiddling their caps and not saying a word. Presently Reggie Turner, who was a wit in his own right as well as a friend of Wilde, said, "I suppose when you two cherubs are alone together neither of you can get in a silence edgeways !"

P.P.S. And again to say that the American *Go* magazine makes me write of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huit Clos* !!!! Also it chops my stuff up into tiny paragraphs, thus doing away with any question of continuity. Have cabled the editor that I am not Romeo, and will not be cut out in little stars to please the New York Juliets.

Oct. 26 Letter to Jock :  
Saturday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR JOCK,

I am going to break a lance with you over your notice of *Cyrano*. Not the whole of the notice, but that part in which you say : "*Cyrano de Bergerac*, indeed, is no more like true poetry than a quarter-pound of jujubes is like a bottle of vintage Burgundy." What do you mean by "true poetry" ? Is Rostand not a true poet because he does not write like, say, Ronsard ? Was Herrick not a poet because he didn't write like Milton ? Lovelace because he was not another Marvell ? Or Suckling because he didn't imitate Spenser ? You are right, of course, in saying that Rostand's play is not true to life. It isn't meant to be, which does not justify your use of the word "rubbish." No, not even if you add the words "alluring" and "betinselled."

Here is a sentence from Montague on another of this great little master's plays : "This week in *Les Romanesques* (translated, with relish and vivacity, by 'George Fleming') we are given about as much of engaging artifice as even M. Rostand can embroider on the very minimum of study from the life." The point here is the little word "even." And again : "The performance showed the real Rostand, the extreme living example, in letters, of one of the two classes into which most artists can be divided—those who seem to be always fighting down the resistance of their medium, crushing its intractability, driving its special difficulties out of sight, and those who seem to hug these very terms of bondage, to parade and salute and play round them. Rostand, you feel more than ever when seeing him acted, is one with the poets who crib and cabin themselves by choice in rondels and triolets and the designers whose special joy is to have a queer-shaped space to fill on some convex surface." I don't see Montague going to all that trouble about a writer of "rubbish."

Your idol, Max, was not easily humbugged. In his article on *Cyrano*—incidentally the first criticism he contributed to the *Saturday*—occurs this : "I like the Byzantine manner in literature better than any other, and M. Rostand is nothing if not Byzantine : his lines are loaded and encrusted with elaborate phrases and curious conceits, which are most fascinating to anyone who, like me, cares for such things."

Two years later, writing about Wyndham's production, Max had this : "Cyrano is the fantastically idealised creation of a poet. In M. Rostand's poetry, under the conditions which that poetry evokes, he is a real and solid figure, certainly. But put him into French prose, and what would remain of him but a sorry, disjointed puppet ?" I do not find any suggestion here that Rostand was not a poet, and that what he wrote was "rubbish." And again :

"Cyrano, in the original version, is the showiest part of modern times—of any times, maybe. Innumerable limelights, all marvellously brilliant, converge on him. And as he moves he flashes their obsequious radiance into the uttermost corners of the theatre. The very footlights, as he passes them, burn with a pale, embarrassed flame, useless to him as stars to the sun. The English critic, not less than the English actor, is dazzled by him. But, though he shut his eyes, his brain still works, and he knows well that an English version of Cyrano would be absurd."

I feel, my dear Gemel, that in your article you were barking up the wrong tree. That you should have told your readers, not that Rostand was no poet, but where and how the English version failed to do justice to a dazzling playwright with a gift for something that the French themselves have allowed to be poetry.

About Ralph's performance. I cannot believe that the ideal representative of Horatio, Enobarbus, Kent, and, of course, Thackeray's Dobbin, can be the ideal Cyrano. There is gold and silver in this actor, but not quicksilver. "Though you can guess what temperance should be, you know not what it is." Substitute "temperament," and you have R. R. It's no good telling me I don't know about temperament. I was brought up on it; my father and Gustave Garcia were not lifelong buddies for nothing. I thought R. was magnificent in the death scene which had real pathos, and just a good, hard-working actor everywhere else. The exact opposite of Coquelin, who—I have a most vivid recollection of the performance—was superb in the first four acts and failed in the last. "All the paraphernalia of emotion were in that memorable passage of acting—were there most beautifully and authentically; but emotion itself wasn't there; and many a duffer could have moved us far more than Coquelin did." Max again, of course. Can't you hear, can't you feel that there is always something of the schoolmaster in Ralph? And an English schoolmaster, at that? Did you believe for one moment the other evening that this was a Frenchman revelling in French absurdity? Loraine, as I remember, played the part as he played every other part, like a policeman on point duty. And Wyndham made Max look forward to the actor's next production.

It is possible, of course, that I am the wrong critic for this production. The right one? William Archer, of course.

Ever,

JAMIE

P.S. I shall be lamentably inadequate on Sunday, owing to my space being reduced to 14 inches. "O rage, ô désespoir, ô vieillesse ennemie!" as somebody in Corneille remarks. Old age is not so hostile to me that I have lost my power of fury. Can you imagine me sitting up in bed this morning, opening my proof and finding the request to cut seventy-six lines! I hurled my salts into one corner of the room, and my cup of tea into the other! I could have cried with disgust.

P.P.S. Have just decided to tackle the thing again next Sunday. What a bore we old men are who cannot leave a subject until we have finished with it! How much more amusing to be young and pull a face at a masterpiece or toss it a posy!

Having posted the letter to Jock, I set about and produced the following:

There is a story of Irving looking on at a rehearsal of the Montague-Capulet fray and saying, "Very good, gentlemen. But don't fuss!" There is a lot of inescapable and tedious fussing in *Cyrano*, tedious because during the fifty years since it was written the film has come about, and crowd scenes are ten for ninepence—in the West End one-and-ninepence. Let it be said that Mr Guthrie has inspired or perhaps dragooned his gallants, *précieux*, buffoons so that they skitter and scramble, leap and bounce and leg-twiddle with an agility and a *désinvolture* proper to another stage.

But the thing, after all, is a poem and not a mindless hop, skip, and jump. I thought the scenery designed by Miss Tanya Moiseiwitsch very delightful, always with the reservation that two minutes finds the most glittering landscape fading on my sight. Is Mr Menges's music a trifle low in key? But let that pass. The poetry's the thing. Or would be if there were any. Whether Mr Brian Hooker is a good poet it is not for me to say. What I will, and must, maintain is that he is not a good poet in Rostand's kind, which, as was said last week, is the tight-rope-walker's kind. Now the essence of tight-rope-walking is that a slip shall have consequences. Scores of times Rostand wilfully gets himself into difficulties so that you say to yourself: "Surely he can't get out of that one? Surely he must slip now?" But he always gets out, and he never slips. The rhyme is there pat, and you realise that he had it up his sleeve all the time. Mr Hooker refuses to rhyme and takes refuge in blank verse, like a tight-rope-walker whose wire is stretched along the floor.

If scenery and music don't matter, and there is no poetry, what remains? The story? But is *Cyrano* so very much of a story? Sir Max Beerbohm has written: "Put *Cyrano* into French prose, and what would remain of him but a sorry, disjointed puppet? . . . An English version of *Cyrano* would be absurd." No, the story by itself is no great shakes. The thing was to find an actor to translate unmagical blank verse into terms of rockets and fizzes, or, if you prefer, the bits of coloured glass which hold the secret of the kaleidoscope. In other words to find a second Lewis Waller. "*Cyrano* is kept up with half-Bacchic, half-chivalrous exuberance and depends for its success on a heroic pitch of madness in the interpretation," wrote Olive Elton. Waller was a master of the heroic pitch. If he could not do much else he could do this, and while Mr Richardson can do many other things he just cannot exuberate vocally, though you can hear him trying. This is a grand

actor when the part is honest ; he would be my first choice for Mr Valiant-for-truth with his " I fought till my sword did cleave to my hand." But Cyrano is a Mr Valiant-for-embroidery, his sword no Jerusalem blade, but a tavern impertinence. Here then we had a super-Bunyanesque actor harnessed to a poem which, as Lemaître reminds us, owes a debt to d'Urfé, Corneille, Gautier, Banville, Scarron, Regnard, Marivaux, Hugo, and Dumas *père*, all of them worlds away from everything that Richardson stands for.

How then did our well-liked actor get through ? Admirably, within the limits of his personality. He had to be, in turn, " arrogant, gorgeous, mad, magnanimous, jovial, tender, subtle, ironic, heroic, melancholy," and Lemaître knew not what else. Well, the new Cyrano was all these things in turn. Everything, in fact, except that he lacked that Puss-in-Boots air which the part demands, for the play is not a tragedy, but a tragic nursery tale. The actor was best, I thought, in the death scene, where he achieved pathos and so was better than Coquelin, who did not. I remember my disappointment of fifty years ago when the great comedian who had enthralled us all with his *fougue* proceeded to die a well-calculated death which turned out to be as unemotional as the bark of the tree which held him up. I remember that the house that afternoon in Manchester was as dry-eyed for Cyrano as it was to be for M. Jourdain in the evening ; at the New Theatre many eyes were wet. But I think Cyrano should die on his feet ; there is a chance that the audience may miss that last word—the famous *panache*—when it is uttered by a man on his back with his face upside-down. Or isn't Mr Richardson too keen on having it heard ?

Oct. 27      In a letter from a young actor :  
Sunday.

The prolonged and unnatural void in the Sunday paper (Nature, they say, abhors a vacuum) has made me fear you may be ill. I hope not, but if so, that you are recovered and will soon be writing again. It is rumoured that you have been in Paris. I wonder if you managed to enjoy yourself ; there is certainly plenty to eat and drink if you can afford it. I had a rather hot and hectic week there some little time ago, but did not really like it much. The *puanteurs* of the Black Market were a little blatant even for my torpid social conscience.

After that I had about six weeks of sunshine, food, and wine in Switzerland—very salubrious. The people I met were mostly not at all the worthy, stolid Swiss I had been led to expect. Zürich has the highest rate of suicide and insanity in Europe, and is full of the most fascinating neurotics and broken-down grandees. I was put up for a time by a Mme X, who has purple teeth, and wears good clothes, but of the 'twenties—" C'était un Patou, mon cher "—and if you look close enough you can see that it might have been once. She is said to have married young to avoid







unhappy home life, and to have found wedlock not much happier. She never liked her husband much, but when he started coming to meals in dark glasses so as not to see her she decided This is Enough, sold her *bourgeois* furniture and bought a cinema in Zürich, and later a café, which is hung with Picassos, Klees, etc. She also paints *des abstraits*, and says, "Moi, je déteste les italiens, mais comme gigolos ils sont *parfaits*." After I left she was prosecuted by the *Sittlichkeitspolizei*, and I was cited as one of her gigolos—alas! unjustly. I came home without even a watch!

I know you don't like the society of young actors, but when I am in London (which is rare) I shall venture to ring you up in the hope of your receiving me and buying me a supper.

**Oct. 29** I think I have found a cure for that testiness which has  
**Tuesday.** been growing upon me. And why shouldn't it? This afternoon's post brings three letters. The first is from an ass at High Wycombe who wants to know why in my book reviews I indulge in so much quotation. "You are getting money for words you haven't written?" The second is from some cretin who asks why I attribute "You are old, Father William" to Southey, when all the world knows that it's Lewis Carroll. I get this bunged at me three times a year; the last complaint came from Rugby. Third letter: Will I tell a lady in Colchester the name of a good book she can take out to New Zealand as a present to a man of forty-five?

The cure? I sit in my armchair and let Joseph Azzopardi, my assistant houseboy, play me an hour of records. I leave the choice entirely to him. Here is to-day's programme:

*Beatrice and Benedict* Overture. Berlioz.

Airs from *Pagliacci* and *La Tosca*.

Second and third movements of Beethoven's C minor Piano Concerto.

Trio from *Rosenkavalier*.

"Baiser de la Fée." Stravinsky.

"Variations on a Nursery Tune." Dohnányi.

After which, being somewhat comforted, I sally forth to watch somebody scamper about as the heroine of a whale of a novel turned into a shrimp of a stage-play.

**Oct. 30** This morning's mail is an improvement on yesterday  
**Wednesday.** afternoon's. The first letter, from St Osyth, in Essex, informs me that "good poets like Shelley can write nonsense, and nonsense-writers like Wordsworth can occasionally rise to real poetry."

The second letter was accompanied by a copy of Lysiane Bernhardt's book on her grandmother :

*Magdalen College  
Oxford*

DEAR MR AGATE,

While holidaying in Paris I chanced on the enclosed biography, and, like all good *Ego* readers, there chugged into my mind the train of thought: Pepper and salt; knife and fork; Bernhardt and Agate.

Anyway, I thought you might like to have the book. Yet, for all I know, you may have read the book. For all I know you may have written the bloody thing! As for me, although I could cope with reading it in French, to have to slit open the pages—'tis too much. One might move a mountain, but to have to climb it as well . . .

Please accept this gift, then, from a slave who bows before the tank-like irresistibility of the *Ego* books. And the slave is an English Literature student into the bargain!

Best wishes,

RONALD CAMERON

Have answered :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR MR CAMERON,

No, this is one of the books I have *not* written about S. B. Many thanks all the same. Your gracious present and graceful note accompanying it are now enshrined—or, anyhow, ensconced—in my 9th and last *Ego*.<sup>1</sup>

I quite agree about cutting pages. That was part of a more leisured age.

Again many thanks.

Yours sincerely,

JAMES AGATE

<sup>1</sup> In eight weeks' time I finish the thing. Nobody will ever begin to guess what a labour it has been. And this generation won't know what a work it is!

Third letter was from George Lyttelton :

*Finndale House  
Grundisburgh  
Suffolk*

DEAR J. A.,

How I wish I had your knowledge of French! Mine is a very humdrum affair, and I never really *feel* the language. You seem to

possess it as Dr Johnson did Latin. But I can see the holes in B. Hooker. "Christian had good looks" is housemaid's English. Pronunciation is going the same way as spelling. In that spectacular rubbish *Cæsar and Cleopatra* most of the cast said "Brittanus" for "Britannus," and do you think any stockbroker's or solicitor's clerk ever spells my name right first go? I always take an acid pleasure in stressing the fact that the *only* function of clerks is to be accurate about details, rather on the lines of Johnson's explanation of a vaguely malevolent line in the *Dunciad*, "Sir, he hoped it would vex somebody."

Here is a small point which may bore you, though it is fundamentally your fault, as it occurred to me while reading *Around Cinemas* (which is quite fascinating—like Shaw's *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, in that it doesn't in the least matter whether one has seen the play criticised). It is the old question of Holmes's university. Well, in *The Two Students* one of the clues is a small lump of *black clay* left on the chair where the young man had put his running-shoes. He had been practising the long jump. Well, in those days, whatever it may be now, it was *only* at Fenner's, Cambridge, where he could have jumped into black clay. The normal long-jump bed was of loose brown loam, but old Watts, the Fenner's groundsman, produced this stuff—probably from the fens—claiming (quite rightly) that, as there was no crumbling at the edges of a footprint, measurement of the jump was far more accurate. Surely this is proof positive. There is no doubt about the fact, because when I was in the C.U.A.C. I often went to Oxford and saw their long-jump arrangements.

And here is a cutting from an Eton housemaster which I am confident cannot fail. I wish he had boldly gone ahead with the passage. Boys' attention at House Prayers is such that I believe he would have got away with it, though it is an undeniably arresting sentence.

I am still a horrid colour, though perhaps it is now primrose rather than buttercup. But they won't let me leave the house, and in any case I should hate to appear in public with this leprous façade.

Yours ever,

GEORGE LYTTTELTON

Cutting alluded to above :

Well, I thought of you a week or so ago. For Prayers I use a dark blue book called *A Chain of Prayer through the Ages*. Last Thursday, after I had read my bit of St Luke, we all knelt down and I opened the *Chain* to utter a choice piece of Jeremy Taylor or Cardinal Newman. What met my eyes was "Bout of wind at the Savage Club after luncheon to C. B." As you will surmise, I had in error brought down *A Shorter Ego : vol. I*! Like a Scotch Meenister I had to extemporise brilliantly, and we got through somehow.

Oct. 31                      Postcard from Lyttelton :  
Thursday.

Grundisburgh

Mental decay goes *pari passu* with bodily. I think I omitted to mention that in *The Three (not Two?) Students* there is a strong indication that Holmes was visiting his old university, but I cannot lay hands on my Sherlock omnibus, so cannot prove it. Rather a down-at-heel little episode. Forget it. The doctor told me yesterday I ought to be still in bed. I refused to go, so he compromised by saying I must behave as if I was in bed. How does one do that ?

G. W. L.

Letter from Jock :

33 King Street  
Covent Garden, W.C.2

DEAR JAMIE,

Hoots and havers ! Rostand is no more a true poet than W. S. Gilbert was a true poet. And, similarly, *Cyrano de Bergerac* is no more translatable into English than, say, *Iolanthe* is translatable into French. That is all there is to be said about that pair of pyrotechnicians.

Incidentally I looked up A. B. Walkley on Loraine's first production in 1919. Heed him : "*Cyrano* is audaciously, triumphantly, flamboyantly romantic. Yes, we know it is rhetoric, not poetry. Yes, we know it is high artifice rather than high art. Artifice its passion, artifice its pathos—the whole thing as artificial as *Cyrano's* duel in rhyme. But it remains supremely romantic . . . romantic to the tip of *Cyrano's* nose. Romantic love, romantic self-sacrifice, romantic courage, romantic clothes, romantic noses, romantic high-falutin', and romantic death. . . ."

About Ralph's performance. My piece had to be written *before I saw the performance*. I should explain the circumstances. Many weeks ago Richard Winnington was asked to move his film stuff back to Friday because the *News Chronicle's* Saturday Page was too congested. He refused to budge. Whereupon they asked me to move to Friday in his stead. I moved—and have been sorry and uneasy ever since. It means that my stuff has to be delivered and printed on Thursday morning—and that [if there is a Thursday-night *première* I have to write about the thing without seeing it and add a word at ten at night ( if the printers are in a good temper). The result is that—*Cyrano* being done on Thursday night—my piece was written before the production. I am well aware of it. It has the air of having been written a day before—just as your *Sunday Times* piece has the air of being written thirty or forty years ago !

In a Radio-News-Reel (overseas) broadcast *next day* I could say

of Ralph's performance—having seen the play (for the first time !): “ This first-night was naturally one of those occasions when what I may call the Ah !-you-should-have-seen people were very much to be heard during the intervals. Aged playgoers were around to tell us we should have seen the great Coquelin, for whom the part was originally written away back in the 'nineties. Elderly playgoers even more volubly told us that we should have seen Charles Wyndham in the first English translation in the year 1900. People of middle age or rather over informed us that we should have seen Robert Loraine when he made his name in the part in 1919, and again when he revived the play in 1919.

“ Well, we younger playgoers can now say that we have seen Ralph Richardson as the poetical swashbuckler with the unhappy nose, and that we are fairly satisfied. Richardson plays this superb part probably as well as any Englishman can ever play that intensely French Gascon. He is without the Gallic temperament, of course, the quality that the French themselves call *fougue*. But he has almost everything else that is needed—great vocal range and speed, colour, variety, and pace, animation when needed and tenderness when called for, a convincing expertness in fencing both with swords and words (and in both at the same time—as in the famous rhyming duel scene in the first act). One of the minor characters calls Cyrano ‘ the three musketeers rolled into one.’ Richardson's Cyrano is at least two of them—probably as much as is possible for an actor who is an Anglo-Saxon actor.”

I should have said much the same in the *News Chronicle* if I had seen the damned thing—except that, since I was writing for an English penny paper instead of talking to the rest of the habitable globe, I should have concluded : “ Probably as much as is possible for an actor who is as Anglo-Saxon as Portland Bill.”

Ever,

JOCK

To which I replied :

Nonsense, dear Jock. Wait till I've finished this bloody Diary, after which my next two jobs will be to translate *Cyrano* into English and *Iolanthe* into French ! So sucks to you ! in the language of my boyhood.

JAMIE

Nov. 1      Again to George Lyttelton :  
Friday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

Have you seen *The Times* on the revival of T. S. Eliot's piece of super-bosh, *The Family Reunion* ?

"It is good to see this play again less for its own sake than for the sake of the verse. No verse written by any other modern poet approaches more nearly to the condition of drama. Its idiom has no archaic inflections; it is consistently precise and lucid; it can carry a joke which Mr Wodehouse would not disdain and, without breaking its own texture, pass to a delicate transfiguration of religious and poetic experience."

And I will maintain against the entire body of critics that the poetry is not poetry at all, and that the whole thing is pretentious rot. I remember writing my *S.T.* criticism in the form of a pastiche, and laughing my head off while I was doing it. Some bits of it might help to tickle away your jaundice:

I do not expect modern art to sound nice,  
Or even to look nice.  
I am not alarmed because a horse by Chirico bears no resemblance to  
one by Solario.  
Or perturbed when Hindemith sounds like somebody shooting coals.  
Or distressed when a block of luxury flats looks like a ship or a warehouse.  
That the pretty-pretty should give place to the ferro-concrete  
Is just the age expressing itself.  
What does worry me about this play is something altogether different—  
The sneaking suspicion that I may not be intellectually up to it.  
"Il est si facile," said Balzac, "de nier ce que l'on ne comprend pas."

These highbrows will be the death of me yet. Do you know the story of the naval officer who was heard to say, "What with the grog and the fog it appears that I picked up an old aunt of mine"? Read Arturo Barea on Lorca and you will pick up

Soledad Montoya, the impassioned woman—  
yellow copper, her flesh  
smells of horse and of shadow—

In the same book—*Writers of To-day*—there is an essay on James Joyce by somebody called Stuart Gilbert. S. G. recounts a meeting between Frank Budgen and James Joyce in Zürich at the time when *Ulysses* was in the making. Joyce told Budgen that he had been working hard all day on two sentences: "Perfume of embraces all him assailed. With hungered flesh obscurely, he mutely craved to adore." Joyce said to Budgen, "You can see for yourself in how many different ways the words might be arranged." S. G. is terrifically impressed. Doesn't he realise that long before Joyce was born schoolboys had great fun in seeing in how many different ways they could arrange "The ploughman homeward plods his weary way"? And is it too much to ask of clever people that they should get their French right? Then there's Jack Lindsay on Jack Priestley. But I should be more impressed with Lindsay on what constitutes a Dickensian if he could spell the names of Dickens's novels correctly!

Under another cover I send a book which you may like, *The Happy Cricketer*, by somebody who calls himself "A Country

Vicar." Do you know who this is? Probably you know that in 1902 Ranji's scores in three Test Matches were 18, 0, 2, 0. And that C. B. Fry's figures for three Test Matches in the same year were 0, 0, 1, 4. Which should teach our Edriches and Comptons not to be downhearted when they strike a bad patch. Keep the book, or give it to some youngster. I am in generous mood to-day owing to the arrival from New York of two exciting-looking books sent by Tom Curtiss, and four pounds of chocolates, of which I suspect Dorothy and Lillian. Have just written what I regard as a model letter: "Dear Gishes, Yours more succulently than ever. J. A." Which goes for you too.

JAMES AGATE

P.S. Your friend's letter. Delicious! The bouts still go on, aggravated, possibly, by my having only one tooth left in my upper jaw. (If ever you have a denture don't tread on it in the bath-room. The new one has been ready these eight weeks, but I haven't had time to collect it. My dentist lives in Hackney, excusable because he is a great artist. But for me he's ungettable. Three hours at least, and I haven't got three hours.) The bouts are now followed by palpitation, to which succeeds panic, for which there is no rational cure. Hamlet was in the best of health and spirits in his "defy augury" speech. I take my comfort in recollection of a Manchester pantomime of forty years ago—*Sinbad the Sailor*. Harry Tate played a negro sea-cook, and at the sight of his black face and rolling eyes—Montague called them "emergent and convolving"—some other clown said, "You make my heart palpitate." Harry said, "Let it palp!" And I do.

P.P.S. A kind friend sends me the cheap edition of *Playgoing*, a little book, in a series edited by Priestley, that I wrote in 1927. The lettering on the back reads

### PLAYGOING

J. B. Priestley

What a lot of fun one could have with this sort of thing. *The Sorrows of Satan*, by Edith Sitwell; *Jude the Obscure*, by Ursula Bloom; *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, by Dean Inge; *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, by Charles Morgan.

Nov. 2            There are times when I wish I had been born with the  
Saturday.        gift of insincerity. I wasn't, alas! Some little time  
ago an old Yorkshire friend took me over his stables  
and carefully explained how each animal in turn would prove to be,  
if it wasn't now, the wonder and the marvel of the Hackney world.  
"What do you think of them?" he asked. I said, "You've got one  
first-rate and one promising animal. The rest of the thirty-six aren't  
worth a damn." Yes, I am a blurter out of truth. And now I am

faced with having to tell the *Tatler* what I think about last night's Royal Command Film Performance at the Empire. A cleverer man than I am would realise that just as there are horses for courses so there are different kinds of critical truth for different occasions. He would recognise that this was a National 'do,' that the nation concerned was Great Britain, and that all the idiotic newspaper fuss about what frock this film-star would wear and what that film-star's jewels were worth was entirely right and proper. Opening this morning's paper, he would have agreed that last night's mass hysteria, the casualties which resulted in the foyer being turned into a first-aid station, and the inability of the police to do more than prevent things from being worse were only to be expected. A critic of this calibre would proceed to ask himself what kind of film would be correct to show on such an occasion. A work of art? Hang it, he would say to himself, this is a national occasion, and nobody wants the thing to be a flop. Wherefore he would refrain from saying that Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death*, which I had seen at the Press Show a few hours previously, was the worst big film he had ever seen. Or, if he must say it, it would be in support of the view that the worst big film was exactly right for the occasion. According to the preliminary literature the picture is a "stratospheric joke told against the background of Two Worlds, photographed in Technicolor and monochrome." Well, why not? Don't jokes and jamborees go together? And then the diplomatic fellow would, I think, take refuge in divagation, and launch into an essay on the difference between the earthbound joke and the joke stratospheric. Whereas I, clumsy fool, cannot help pointing out that (a) matters of life and death are not jokes, stratospheric or otherwise, and that (b) the function of any kind of joke is to be funny. And this film was deadly serious. All about an air-pilot who, simultaneously meeting with an accident and a pretty girl, finds himself between life and death, and thinking, as Damon Runyon would say, of this and that, and one thing and another, especially things that have proved most confusing to many citizens. In other words, it is all a dream. Whereupon I blunderingly suggest that the function of dreams is to be poetic. But the Powells and Pressburgers of this world know better. Remembering *Cabin in the Sky*, they realise what must be the fate of any film about the Hereafter which should leave the safe ground of flat thinking and even flatter imagination. Doubtless it was for this reason that they caused their hero to dream after the manner of cinema addicts. To postulate heaven as a *palais de danse* swollen to



the size of Wembley Stadium with New York's Grand Central Station thrown in. (I shouldn't have been in the least surprised if at any moment Fred Astaire had come twinklingly on.) How does one get to this Paradise? Obviously by means of an escalator about five hundred times the size of those in use at London's Tube stations. And what does this Elysium look like when you get there? The answer is a speculative builder's ecstasy of lath and plaster with an odd suggestion of Hollywood's Bowl. What happens to the pilot in his dream? He becomes the subject of legal proceedings. Is he, an Englishman, a fit mate for an American girl? Here the film becomes a welter of singularly ill-timed Anglo-American bickerings. America taunts this country with the Crimean War, the Zulu War, the Boer War, our treatment of India, the Boxer riots, and the troubles with Ireland after the 1914-18 war; we reply by throwing in America's face the things of which we have disapproved. (Did P. and P. conveniently forget about lynching?) Now I hold that this cannot possibly do good and may easily do harm. Why show at a Command Performance a film which is, on balance, anti-British? Is the production good? I have no opinion. The highbrows may talk about 'visual narrative' and 'cinematic sense'; I just don't and won't associate the Hereafter with something that would have ravished the soul of Madame Tussaud.

Nov. 4      Letter from Jock :  
Monday.

33 King Street  
Covent Garden, W.C.2

DEAR JAMIE,

I fear I'll never be penny-paper-minded. Here is the piece about Becky Sharp which the *News Chronicle* cut out of me o' Friday—not for reasons of space, *but* because it was a quotation!

"Here is a glimpse of Becky's real-life prototype—not at all a well-known passage—from the memoirs of Lady Ritchie, Thackeray's daughter:

" 'One morning a hansom drove up to the door, and out of it emerged a most charming, dazzling little lady dressed in black, who greeted my father with great affection and brilliancy, and who, departing presently, gave him a large bunch of fresh violets. This was the only time I ever saw the fascinating little person who was by many supposed to be the original of Becky; my father only laughed when people asked him, but he never quite owned to it.'

"The lady's name was never divulged."

I showed this excised but surely interesting thing to Lady Colefax, whom I was visiting in hospital the other day. She said, "Oh, yes, I remember meeting Anne Ritchie when I was quite a girl, and she told me an exceedingly interesting thing. She told me that when *she* was a very young girl, ten or eleven in fact, she was taken to a great gaunt house in Paris where in a singularly tall room a pale, thin, dark-haired, sick-looking man was playing the piano beautifully. One of the ladies turned to little Anne Thackeray and said to her, 'Always remember, my dear, that when you were very young you came here to-day and heard Chopin play!'"

Jamie, I hope, this thrills you as it does me. Sybil Colefax, by the way, seems to rate me as importantly as Boswell. For you, on the other hand, her regard is very much of the sort that *Mrs* Boswell had for Dr Johnson!

Ever,

JOCK

*Winged Words*. No. 19: Nowhere, unless it be in *Ein Heldenleben*, does his [Strauss's] clever blatancy achieve such a measure of triumphant vulgarity as in *Tod und Verklärung*. If the awakening to eternity is like this (the tune on the brass), any man of taste would prefer death.

*Music critic, "The Times"*

I take leave of my *Winged Words* with what Kipling's Beetle would have called "a final exhibition, a last attack, a giddy pargeron." Here, then, is No. 20, culled from an "In Memoriam" tribute to a former Official Receiver in Bankruptcy. Then follows the line:

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you."

*Nov. 8* My secretary having resigned, I thought of advertising  
*Friday.* for a young man whose first qualifications should be that he did not wear corduroy trousers or hold any views about anything. And then I had a bit of luck. The Canadian boy who used to write to me from Iceland (see *Ego* 5, p. 140) walked in yesterday and asked for a job. Incidentally he was a sailor and not a soldier. Age thirty-one, has had secretarial experience, can take down in shorthand, type, spell, and speak a little French. I asked him when he could start. He said, "Not before to-morrow afternoon." He started at 3.30 to-day. Name, Michael Russell-Smith.

In the meantime here is a charming story from H  l  ne Vacaresco's *M  morial sur le Mode Mineur*. The author is talking about Calv  :

J'ai d'elle bien des souvenirs encore. En voici un qui me semble significatif. Nous parlions ensemble de notre auguste et si g  n  reux

ami le roi Édouard VII. C'était lors de notre dernière entrevue avenue Kléber à Paris.

"Oh!" me dit Calvé, "il était sublime alors qu'il voulait simplement être drôle. Figurez-vous que la reine Victoria, admiratrice passionnée de *Carmen*, avait commandé mon buste à je ne sais quel sculpteur anglais en renom. Je fus représentée avec des œillets dans les cheveux et une mantille. Enfin je devenais, en marbre, s'il vous plaît, c'est-à-dire presque pour l'éternité, l'héroïne même de Bizet.

"La reine fit placer ce buste à Windsor parmi d'autres objets d'art. Lorsque après son avènement je revis le roi Édouard, incidemment il me parla de ce buste. 'Oh sire!' lui répondis-je, 'je pense que la pauvre Carmen doit être mise de côté, car je sais que tout a changé dans la salle où elle avait été placée.' 'En effet,' me répondit le roi, 'plus d'un changement a eu lieu au château après la mort de ma mère, mais je dois vous avouer que j'ai eu soin de votre buste. J'ai ordonné qu'on le place à côté de celui du duc de Wellington. Vous pourrez ainsi lui répéter le mot de Cambronne pendant toute l'éternité . . .'"

Nov. 9            A lady writes :  
Saturday.

I don't agree with you that Coquelin "did not achieve pathos." I was only seventeen at the time, it is true, but I shall never forget how much I was moved by his death scene in *Cyrano*. Even now, when the leaves fall in the dusk I think of him. I think one often forgets that the great furore caused by the play in those days was its absolute break with the tradition of the then French stage. I have read it three times in the original, and nothing would induce me to see it in English however well done.

Let me try to settle this question once and for all. I was twenty-two and my brother Edward was twenty, and we were both terribly disappointed. Now hear Max Beerbohm on the subject :

On the stage it was always with his brain alone that he made his effects. He had observed, and studied, and thought, and had thought out the exact means of expression. He never let emotion come between himself and his part—never trusted to imagination or inspiration. These, indeed, are qualities which he did not possess. They are incompatible with absence of "nerves." And it was, I suppose, because he could never surrender himself to a part, was always conscious master of it, that Sarah Bernhardt wrote of him in her memoirs that he was "plutôt grand acteur que grand artiste." Certainly, great emotional acting does demand the power of self-surrender—is a passive rather than an active business. Coquelin, in his writings and in his talk, was a sturdy champion of Diderot's paradox. And Coquelin, in the last act of

*Cyrano de Bergerac*, was a shining refutation of the truth of that paradox. All the paraphernalia of emotion were in that memorable passage of acting—were there most beautifully and authentically ; but emotion itself wasn't there ; and many a duffer could have moved us far more than Coquelin did. If Coquelin had been capable of the necessary self-surrender, he would not have been the unapproachable comedian that we loved and revered. It was because his fine brain was absolutely his master that he stood absolutely alone in his mastery of comedic art.

“Plutôt grand acteur que grand artiste.” But Sarah told May that she herself, on the stage with Coquelin, had been enormously moved by his pathos at the end. (How did Sarah come to play such a bad part as Roxane ? Quite simply. She wanted Coquelin for Flambeau (*L'Aiglon*) in her American tour, and held out her Roxane as a bait. I have a photograph of her in the rôle.) There are three possibilities : (1) Sarah drew something out of Coquelin that was not in him at other times. (2) With any other Roxane he had no pathos even when he was trying (Max). (3) When I saw him at Manchester he was just not trying. On the whole I pin my faith to Max, and believe him to have been right both in the matter of fact and the reason why it must have been so. Except that that fine and fastidious critic does not make allowance for the physical factor. All the surrender in the world won't help if the actor hasn't got “les larmes dans la voix.”

Nov. 10      A letter :  
Sunday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR D. B. WYNDHAM LEWIS,

It is so long since I was in the Savage Club that I have forgotten what is our brotherly name for you.

This is to tell you that last night round about eleven-thirty I took up *The Hooded Hawk*—why the devil didn't you just call it *The Real Boswell* ?—and until nearly four in the morning boiled over with admiration and rage. Perhaps I was drunk, but certainly last night I would have given all I have written for that one introductory chapter. (I am not quite so certain this morning.) The whole book breathes the very air and spirit of the time. How you do this I don't know ; it has nothing to do with the wealth of detail proceeding from your immense erudition. To put the matter shortly, I live in your book as I do in Boswell's. (By the way, I have never *read* the *Life* ; what I have done is to dip into it on an average of twice a week throughout fifty years.) It was a

stroke of genius to begin with Boswell's deathbed. And what enchanting phraseology! "All his life Boswell was teetering on the verge of complete sanity." And I like very much, too, your "Boswell had as good a right to the infinite mercy of God as Lord Macaulay himself."

There is just one point I want to make. You write (p. 78) of Boswell dying to cut into the conversation and distinguish himself "like Mr Kipps in the Imperial Grand." And again, on the same page, of Boswell retiring after that first interview "bloody but unbowed." To what extent is one justified in illustrating an eighteenth-century happening by a nineteenth-century reference? Suppose a playwright who tells us his action is happening in the 'nineties should make one of his characters say, "My dear, how very sick-making!" Would not the switch from Pimero's idiom to Waugh's jerk the spectator momentarily out of the period? Suppose I am writing a play about Hannibal. Can I safely make a Captain of the Guard say that he saw his master standing silent on a peak in the Pyrenees? I think you have seen the difficulty, because on the next page (p. 79) you write, "The Doctor, in modern idiom, was in the bag." Resolve me about this.

I have two odd Boswellian snippets for you. One is about a laundry-boy at Barnet whose name turned out to be James Boswell Crummy. His birthplace? Lichfield! The other is a correspondence I had some years ago with a seventeen-year-old schoolboy named James Boswell, the great-great-grandson of Boswell's daughter Elizabeth, who married her cousin William Boswell. You can read about this last in *Ego* 5, pp. 89 and 93.

By the way, I have decided to wind up my Diary at the end of this year. "Superfluous lags the vet'ran on the stage." I wonder who wrote that?

Ever your devoted and abashed

JAMES AGATE

Nov. 11 Another letter to George Lyttelton :

Monday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C. 2*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

My delighted reading of your letter was interrupted by a policeman at my elbow. ("An' I sez to my flutterin' 'eart-strings, I sez to 'em, 'Peace, be still!'") Bow Street wanted to know whether I would go bail in a hundred pounds for somebody with a name I had never heard of. Rang up the station. Age? Thirty-eight. Walk in life? Gentleman. Charge? Larceny. Stealing a motor-car. No. J. A. won't go bail for total strangers.

You ask me what I thought of Alexander Woollcott. I met

him once only, and perhaps it isn't fair. . . . Nonsense, of course it's fair. He impressed me as being a ready but not fine-witted vulgarian. It was at a luncheon party given, I think, by Cochran, and he never said a single pleasant, or even unpleasant, memorable thing. I can no more explain why America's millions listened to him on the wireless than George Jean Nathan could have explained the English passion for Mr Middleton. I seem to be writing a lot of rubbish to-day. Of course Nathan could have explained that. He knows that the English are Middleton-minded.

Have got a difficult job on hand. Am to tell Light Programme listeners what I think of the Film Censorship. But what do I think of any censorship? In the theatre good, because it prevents raids by old ladies with umbrellas, and asinine police. But where draw the line? Ninety per cent. of Hollywood's films lay it down that for a girl to stick to her commonplace lover, marry him, and bear him commonplace brats is to fail in life, while to get more mink than the girl next door is to succeed. You and I laugh at such twaddle; the withers of every typist in the audience are horribly wrung. What must I, as censor, do about a well-made picture which sticks to the truth? Say the life of Emma Crouch, who as Cora Pearl did far better for herself than the sixteenth child of an ex-seaman had any right to expect. She died at the age of forty-four? Yes, but for twenty years she had a magnificent run for fifteen million pounds of other people's money, and I don't see how you can make cancer retributive. Or take Zola's Nana. Where's the moral in smallpox? What about the penniless Miss Rebecca Sharp, who, after a rattling good time, ended up hanging about Bath and Cheltenham "and never without a footman"? If I ban films about successful gold-diggers on moral grounds I must ban good pictures about the Cora Pearls, the Nanans, and the Becky Sharps. If I let these through on artistic grounds I am setting up the doctrine of one moral law for the uneducated many and another moral law for the cultured few. The which I fervently believe, but am not going to make confession of in the Light Programme. I think I shall approve the Censorship as a principle, but lay down one law only. This is that if sniggering films on the subject of, say, prostitutes and 'pansies' are permitted, then the same licence must be granted to films dealing seriously with the tragedy of these unhappy wretches.

To change the subject. I have been having the oddest experiences lately—a kind of *Intimations of Immortality* in reverse. It is as though the glory and the freshness were coming back. I have been finding myself gay for no reason. Recapturing all sorts of early delights—my first summer holidays, what walking in the Lake District used to be like, the feel of a really good crack to leg. Is this the beginning of second childhood? If so it's going to be delicious.

By the way, I've just discovered or invented a new limbo, which I take to be something superior to a dimension. In this, anything that you want to happen, happens and goes on happening, always.

For ever Sir Toby has his "*Pourquoi*, my dear knight?" And longer than any figure on a Grecian urn Traddles looks forward to union with his dearest Sophy.

Yes, it's second childhood all right.

Ever,

JAMES AGATE

Nov. 12 In a letter from George Richards :

Tuesday.

Some weeks ago, unable to sit through any more, I wandered out of the auditorium of the Bournemouth Pavilion toward the end of the first act of a more than usually lame and impudently incompetent domestic comedy-farce and, encountering two Little Men emerging from a door marked Private, I was overcome by an eruption of pent-up righteous indignation. Giving way to impulse, I said, in the politest tones I could command, "Excuse me, gentlemen, are you by any chance connected with the show now being performed in this theatre?" Beamingly they signified an affirmative, being, as I afterwards discovered, the Press Representative and the Assistant Stage Manager. "Well," I said, "perhaps you will permit me to inform you that never in all my theatregoing experience have I encountered such an imbroglio of unadulterated rubbish or such an unimaginably tedious farrago of dreary, demoralising drivel. If its excuse is that it is intended merely as a vehicle for the leading performer, I can only say, gentlemen, that a self-respecting vehicle should have more than one wheel. The play has not a wisp of talent, merit, novelty, or inspiration of any kind and in plot, dialogue, and acting is an insult to the British race."

Pausing a moment to gauge the effect of this, I for the first time took a real look at the Little Men. And beheld in their eyes a vast, unquenchable contentment, and read on their countenances the outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual happiness.

Nov. 18 "The measure of choosing well," wrote Sir William Wednesday. Temple, "is whether a man likes what he has chosen."

This applies particularly to one's friends. It is twenty years since I chose George Mathew, and I have been amply repaid. At least four nights a week, and often five and six, he looks in for an hour's chat on his way to Regent's Park. In that hour we discuss practically everything, though the subject which most crops up is the exact meaning and use of words. Fowler is our Bible here, though a Bible of which one can be critical. Said George to-night, "Why doesn't he come down heavily on those people who say 'infer' when

they mean 'imply' ?" I said, "What about Shakespeare, who uses the two indifferently ?" "Oh, Shakespeare," said George. "He was an ignorant b——, anyway !"

*Nov. 14*        Waking early and unable to get to sleep again, I made  
*Thursday.*       a list of my Likes and Dislikes.

*Dislikes :*

Inaccuracy. Beards. Anglo-Catholics. Jews (most). Bartókery. Surrealism. Imagist poetry. My pictures in the *Daily Express*. Choral singing. Curry. Walking. Women who make up in public. Young men who carry combs. Shaw's plays. Radio comedians. Musicals. Crooning. Dance bands. War books. Heat waves. Walt Disney. Cats. Plays about Schubert. British films. British opera. Cold spells. Crowds. Cinema organs. Dog-racing. English phlegm. Scotch humour. Welsh *hwyl*.

*Likes :*

Irish blarney. Jews (some). Americans. French films. Shaw's prefaces. Groucho Marx. Making a speech. Actresses at the Ivy. Berlioz. Dogs. Babies. Acrobats. Seaside bands. Renoir. Damon Runyon. Wordsworth. Test Matches. Fire-engines. Flood-lighting. Walking-sticks. Asparagus. Work.

*Nov. 15*        The post brought this note from D. B. Wyndham Lewis :  
*Friday.*

*31 Pembroke Road, W.8*

MY DEAR JAMES,

I needn't tell you what pleasure your letter gave me. And as you are one of the very, very few people whose judgment I respect, especially in literary matters, you may take me as being in a very pleasant glow at this moment, bless you.

You're quite right about lapses into modern idiom. It's slipshod and silly, and I don't know how it happened, except that there are times when one's attention slips a cog. I wish now I'd asked you to look over the proofs, but I know you have enough to do without that. My only excuse is that I got them in a nursing-home, recovering from an almost fatal nephritis last March, and dizzy with morphia.

No, don't give up *Ego*, James ! It's the perfect bedside book (except that it keeps one awake), and it's a classic exercise in the difficult art of not boring. I can't think of any reason for your not going on till the gong rings, and I mean it, as a fan of long standing. Moreover, I doubt if I could ever think of anything even faintly malicious to say to you, even in fun. I keep that sort of thing for what Barbey d'A. called the richly antlered herd. Do change your mind, I implore you.



Thanks for the Boswell items.

I wish I could afford the set of the Boswell Papers (Isham's). It's a beautiful piece of work, and I don't grudge the time I spent at the London Library. Incidentally, do you know what the Doctor really said to Garrick about his going behind the scenes at Drury Lane: "I'll come no more behind your scenes, David; the white bosoms of your actresses excite my genital organs." Compare the discreet version in the *Life*. The Papers are full of meat.

Yours ever, and with warm thanks for a letter I shall treasure,

BEVAN

P.S. I had meant to quote, *en passant*, something about that Boswell descendant you mention in *Ego* 5, but like many other things it slipped my memory. I was feeling ill all last year. "James Boswell Crummy" is an admirable name for a laundry-boy. Here's another—I met a chap called Jorian Jenks. Wouldn't you swear he was out of a G. K. C. story?

Nov. 16            A letter to Jock:

Saturday.

*As from Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

JOCK, MA LADDIE,

I am writing this sitting in Charles Smith's front room in his high flat on Marine Parade, Brighton. A gentle day, and I look down on a fisherman "diminished to his cock," if you know what I mean. At this moment I am asking myself: Do seagulls have asthma? And if so, do they stop for breath, and, stopping, do they stall like aeroplanes? I ask because last night it took me five minutes, and perhaps a bit more, to cover thirty yards! I had a dreadful experience the other evening at the theatre, where I had to climb four flights of stairs to get to the what-d'you-call-it.

In future my criterion for any play is: Are the foyer, stalls, bar, and so forth all on the same level? (I don't care where they put the stage.) Similarly the acting will be judged according as to whether my stall is an end one and on the same side as the Gents.

Am down here for a couple of days' rest, which it seems I need. (I find it humiliating to be dictated to by one's body.) Charles is a perfect host. George Mathew came down with me, and we sat up till 2 A.M. settling the affairs of Europe—nay, of the globe. This morning at nine Charles gets up, cooks, and serves three breakfasts—bacon, sausage, toast, real butter, strawberry jam, tea. He brings one tray in to me, take, another in to George, and retires to bed with his own. His housekeeper comes in about eleven, when we are supposed to think about getting up. One of the things which distresses me in this matter of increasing infirmity is the

nuisance one is to one's friends. This week-end I am embarking on the finer tact of not apologising. It should be presumed that people who invite old buffers to stay with them know what they are in for. They must know that you may die on their hands. The time was, Jock, when I wanted this to happen when I was driving off the third tee, into the purple hills, on the old Chapel-en-le-Frith golf course. But since that cannot now happen the armchair in Charles's bow-window will do very nicely.

But to come to the point of this letter, which is you and not me. (If grammar says the last word should be 'I' then grammar is wrong.) I have before me the *Tatler*, in which Clifford Bax has an article. He asks who is our best dramatic critic, and answers "Alan Dent." Next I hear that you are to be one of the six judges in the Embassy Theatre's award of "Oscars" for the year's best playwright, actor, and actress. Finally Gerald Barry told me two nights ago that you have been appointed film critic to the *Illustrated London News*. I could, of course, just pat you on the back with a few well-chosen words of congratulation. Let me do it more elegantly. Let me remind you of somebody—de Marsay, I think—who in *Le Père Goriot*, if I mistake not, said about Rastignac, "Décidément, ce jeune homme commence à percer."

It is the duty of the elderly to say nice things about the youngish; this time duty puts on her pleasantest face. In other words, I'm happy about you, and Paul Dehn, who has suddenly started to write very much better, and Lionel Hale, whom I met in Regent Street recently almost recovered from his accident.

I have drooled a little too much on old age in this letter. But the springs of emotion are not entirely dried up. When the porter at the Grand Hotel welcomed me and remembered my name I wept. Eight years and an intervening war! But between sobs I managed to tip him two shillings. It would have been half a crown if Stanley Rubinstein hadn't telephoned me just as I was leaving to say that he must have £300 for income tax on Monday morning, and where is it coming from?

Ever,

JAMIE

Nov. 17      A seventy-m.p.h. gale. "Lines of white on a sullen sea,"  
*Sunday.*      make me feel Tosti-ish. To shake this off sit down to  
                  compose my broadcast:

Films are fun. But the funniest thing of all about them is, I am persuaded, the Film Censorship. In this country censorship of the theatre was originally a device to prevent the Government of the day from being attacked by playwrights holding contrary political views. It was a political muzzle. Censorship as a means of supervising morals came later. How about America? Well, I happened to be in New York when the movement to ban strip-tease and fan dancers started. Now note this. As long as these exhibi-

tions confined themselves to the vaudeville theatres of Greenwich Village and that part of New York which corresponds to our East End American morality was not disturbed. It was only when these shows began to invade Broadway and draw the public away from the legitimate theatres that the public conscience was stirred. And who stirred it? The owners of the legitimate theatres.

I am in favour of censorship for one reason, and one reason only. Without it any play or film would be at the mercy of some old woman of either sex marching down the gangway brandishing an umbrella and protesting that she is being outraged and insulted. Or at the mercy of some ignorant policeman or asinine Watch Committee. The censorship saves us from that.

But for whom are we to censor films? Adults or juveniles, the educated or the illiterate? I have been studying Raymond Moley's book entitled *The Hays Office*, published last year. Here are some items from the list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" adopted by the California Association for the Guidance of Producers. The Association resolves that none of the things mentioned in the first half of its list shall appear in pictures "irrespective of the manner in which they are treated." I will take four points only.

One. The words 'hell' and 'damn.' I see. A soldier who has his hand blown off is to wave the stump and say, "Bless my soul. Look at this!" Such an embargo would put an end to the filming of half of Eugene O'Neill's plays, and, of course, to Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

Two. Miscegenation, or sex relationship between the white and black races. I see. White girls may make friendships with coloured soldiers—our English girls did in the War—but they must not be allowed to know to what such attachments may lead.

Three. Sex hygiene and venereal diseases. Again I see. Prevention and cure are to be put beyond the pale. By this edict Brieux's *Damaged Goods* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*, two of the world's most moral plays, are out.

Four. Any inference of sex perversion. But the walk, accent, mannerisms, and phraseology of what are known as 'pansies' are part of the stock-in-trade of nine-tenths of our music-hall and film comedians. I see no objection. To what, then, do I object? To the fact that a serious play or film dealing with the tragedy of those unhappy persons, male and female, whose sex instincts are not normal would be rigidly banned. What about the film called *Children in Uniform*? That film was possible because the audience could pretend that the attachment which was its subject matter was romantic and abstract. The same with gold-digging. If Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth are allowed to show nitwits the glamorous side of that profession, then sanity demands that some serious actress should be allowed to show us the real side!

The second half of the Association's list deals with subjects about which special care is to be exercised. These include, to mention again only four, the use of firearms, brutality, third-degree

methods, a woman's sale of her virtue. Let us take these in their order. In the matter of firearms I seem to have made acquaintance with a good many sawn-off shotguns. Brutality? We have all seen some pretty hefty fights. Third-degree methods? I think you and I could recall one or two pictures in which these have been fully exploited. The sale of a woman's virtue? What do the film-makers imagine that the opulent charmer so brilliantly portrayed by Mae West offers her customers when they come up to see her? Rock buns? No. Hollywood still contrives to evade its own laws. In spite of its Hays Office it has succeeded in making the world's dirtiest pictures.

In my view America has a right to say what shall or shall not be shown on her screens. Therefore I have no sympathy with the maker of British pictures who complains that they are censored when they get to the other side. He should use his brains, and learn to be dirty in the manner which America approves. I am not attacking Hollywood. I have no doubt that the frantic nonsense which besets the Hays Office has its counterpart in English censorship. But English censorship is clever enough not to publish its guiding principles. At least, I have never seen a copy of them.

The Hays Office insists that in every picture virtue shall be rewarded and vice punished. And it lays further stress on this, that evil shall not be presented so attractively that when the audience emerges into the street it forgets the ultimate fate of the sinner and remembers only the delights of sinning. But consider this. I, a grown man, will not easily be turned into a gangster; the idea that I could be a 'big shot' does not appeal to me. But what about the grocer's boy? You, madam, listening to me—take your case. You are happily married, adore your husband and children, and are adored by them. The idea of being a gangster's moll may not be your idea of fun. But what about the little missie who cleaned your doorstep this morning? Dangle mink and diamond bracelets before her, and is she going to be deterred by the thought that twenty years hence she will die a miserable death in gutter or hospital? Remember that by the Hays Code she has not been allowed to know that such a death impends.

The censorship can do what it likes in the way of embargoes and warnings. *It cannot censor the minds of the young, and particularly of the uneducated young.* The grocer's boy may well elect for a short life and a merry one. He may think getting bumped off at forty a fair price to pay for twenty years of high-powered cars and expensive women. The little maid who keeps your house clean may not grumble at the prospect of having to chuck herself into the river at some distant date provided that for the next twenty years she is the envy of every other woman in town. In other words, both grocer's boy and hired help may think the game worth the candle.

And now I make my last point. As I said, I approve of the censorship only because non-censorship can be a greater nuisance.

But I would have a super-censor who would be a man of culture, a man who knows a work of art when he sees one, and not somebody who might just as well be in the Post Office. There is a famous French film entitled *Le Rosier de Madame Husson*. In this a young man wins a prize for possessing more of innocence than any other lad in the village. He spends the money on getting drunk, and for the rest of his life is never sober. My super-censor would say to his subordinate, "Hands off! This picture is a masterpiece of irony. It is adapted from a story by Guy de Maupassant, one of the world's great writers, and recognised as such in a country at least as intelligent as this one. Therefore I say, 'Hands off!' But if you like to ban *Getting Gertie's Garter* or *Up in Mabel's Room* on the ground not of morality but of sheer, stark, staring imbecility, that is O.K. by me."

Nov. 18      "The bright day is done, and we are for the dark." But  
Monday.      it's the twilight I object to and not the blackness. What  
                 must it be like to retire from the prize ring a world-beater  
at forty, and know forty years of oblivion? I think perhaps it  
doesn't matter with boxers; it takes brains to be bored. But what  
about actors who can no longer remember their words? Or actresses  
carried into the Ivy on litters? Old Age—I do detest, abhor, execrate,  
and give thee to sixscore thousand devils.

Nov. 19      Like every other young Canadian who goes to a university,  
Tuesday.      Russell-Smith when he was at McGill filled in the holidays  
                 by doing odd jobs for pocket money. At one time he was  
a waiter, at another a grave-digger. This morning, my houseboy  
being in bed with flu, R.-S. kindly deputised by bringing in my  
breakfast, which he did with the poise of experience. Dusting the  
table with an imaginary napkin, he said, "I wonder whether my  
other job will come in as handy?" Now we defy augury, and  
all that. All the same, it was just as well that I had got up in good  
spirits.

Nov. 20      A letter from Arthur Rose :  
Wednesday.

30 Old Queen Street  
Westminster, S.W.1

DEAR JAMES,

I always whoop with joy when you tell them that plays must  
have skeletons; but I groan when you slip up and say it is a defect  
of Mr Bates's play, *The Day of Glory*, that its action can be foreseen.

You know as well as I do that drama can't begin until the play's action is foreseen. What masterpiece omits the foreshadowing of its action? Look at the bluntness with which Master Will always foretells his action. Take *Othello* as example. See how Iago acts as his author's chorus to foretell crisis after crisis. The fact is, adult suspense in the theatre lies not in the audience wondering what is going to happen next, but in their foreknowing, and waiting in dread or hope for some one in the play to learn what they foreknow. I know I am teaching grandpa the ancient art of sucking eggs, but didn't he ask for it?

Yours,

ARTHUR ROSE

I write :

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR ARTHUR,

You would be right if you said that the highest kind of drama cannot begin, etc., etc. Obviously we know that Lear's children are going to make it hell for the old boy. But who at the first performance knew that Friar Laurence's letter was going to mis-carry? Which just puts *R. and J.* on a lower level than *K. L.* Whoever in *La Dame aux Camélias* foresaw the visit of old Duval or what that visit portended? Who knew what was going to happen in *A Doll's House*? The audience on that first night was as much surprised as Nora when Thorvald called her a bloody little fool.

Bates's play is all talk, and as the talk isn't quite good enough we want something to turn up to relieve the monotony of regurgitated leading articles. And you'll agree that the property of things turning up is unexpectedness. Consider those three superb *coups de théâtre*—the discovery that the man in *La Parisienne* is the lover and not the husband, John Worthing's entry in mourning in Wilde's play, and Lady Frederick's appearance *en déshabillé*. Where would the fun be if one expected these? And what is a *coup de théâtre* if there is no *coup*? Think it over.

Always,

JAMES

Nov. 21 Letter to George Lyttelton :  
Thursday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

In spite of all efforts to get rid of my obsession about misprints, not only in my own work but in other people's, the damned thing continues. Here is the latest crop. In his *Time Was* Graham

Robertson is made to write of Alexandre Dumas *file*, and this in the book's seventh impression! *Stalky and Co.* Stalky continues the conversation in a loud and cheerful *noice*. This, if you please, in the twentieth reprinting of the pocket edition. One of our high-brow musical critics gives the title of Debussy's piece as *L'Après Midi D'Un Faune*. One wrong accent, one hyphen omitted, and four capital letters which should be lower case. The American paper *Go*, whose London correspondent I have just become, makes me add an extra 'l' to Dame Madge Kendal. This particularly infuriates me, since I must have written twenty letters to thumb-sucking critics misspelling the name of the old rhinoceros.

Apropos, I hear from Bertie van Thal that you are cross with me for calling Milton "a monumental and boring old buffer." Some geniuses are set so high that the stones you throw at them never get there, and perhaps I thought that "monumental" made it safe. Of course, I realise that *Lycidas* is the greatest long-short poem in the language, with Wordsworth's *Intimations* as its only rival. Similarly, I realise that Prospero's "cloud-capp'd towers" speech is one of the greatest things in Shakespeare. But if you turn to my first article in *Brief Chronicles* you will see that I call Prospero "that endless chunnerer" and "an old josser." Yet if I had to choose any one article of mine suggesting that delicacy of perception was not utterly beyond me, I think it would be that one. Wherefore I stick to "old rhinoceros" as a proper term to apply to Madge K., the third or fourth greatest actress I have seen.

And now I have to plead really guilty to something. Somewhere in *Ego* 8 I allude to the extraordinary influence that *Macbeth* had on the mind of Charles Dickens, citing three references in the novels—two in *David Copperfield* and one in *Dombey and Son*. Yesterday, if you please, I found a reference in *Little Dorrit*. The guests at the great Physician's have assembled, all but Mr Merdle: "Mr Merdle's default left a Banquo's chair at the table; but if he had been there, he would have merely made the difference of Banquo in it, and consequently he was no loss." The point? Simply that there may be lots more allusions to Shakespeare's play, and unless I am prepared to come forward with all of them I ought not to have broached the subject. Paris gave my mother her lightness of touch and Heidelberg her thoroughness. I have inherited the latter, which with me has become mania. I respect the competent thug more than I do the bungling knight-at-arms. There's a lot to be said for Germans, even Nazis. And now I suppose you're shocked.

To change the tune. Here is something I jotted down this morning that I shall use when some highbrow ass provokes me sufficiently: "To me a poet is somebody who writes something that is going to make me happier, in the way that the sweep of some Handelian air or haunting melody of Chopin makes me happy, for

the rest of my life. Something about magic casements, glimmering squares, mantles blue, incense-breathing morns, sprays the bird clung to, thoughts that lie too deep for tears. T. S. Eliot is not a poet in the sense that Keats, Tennyson, Milton, Gray, Browning, Wordsworth were poets. He is a philosopher-cook bent on frying metaphysical fish in free verse."

However, I don't suppose my views on poetry matter. As for the misprints, things without all remedy should be without regard. So don't bother to answer this. I only trouble you with it because it helps to get one's mind straight. Friendship with an egoist has its drawbacks !

Ever,

JAMES AGATE

P.S. As I am about to post this I see that in Whymper's book on the Matterhorn the Deity is represented as in trouble with His French accents. On the tomb of Édouard Goehrs, the young Strasbourg climber, appear the words : " Mes pensées ne sont pas vos pensées . . . a dit l'Eternel."

*Nov. 22* Spend the morning over a notice of *Caste*. Call attention  
*Friday.* to the fact that dramatic critics who reprint their notices in book form do something more than satisfy their vanity—to wit, compile stage history. The value of this is realised only when one comes across a gap. In the matter of Tom Robertson's play there is not a line to show the reaction of contemporary criticism. (I have not the time to go trotting off to Hendon or wherever the newspapers buried their files when the bombing started.) Henry Morley stops his *Journal of a London Playgoer* twelve months all but a day before *Caste's* first night. And Dutton Cook begins his *Nights at the Play* four months and a few odd days after that first night. Maddening ! In despair I turn up *The Journal of the Bancrofts*, and find nothing except a long story of how on the first night somebody played a practical joke with George d'Alroy's wig. As I can't find anything I have to do some hard work of my own. Incidentally, I point out that if it hadn't been for J. A. and eight devoted publishers there would not be a single line in book form from which any future student could glean anything about the English theatre in the last quarter of a century. Why shouldn't I indulge in a tootle on the trumpet when it's justified ?

Having finished the *S.T.* article, rushed down to Grosvenor Square and delivered a wireless talk to soldiers left behind in Burma and Japan. I find that the old mind still gets about fairly easily ; the nuisance is carting the old body around.



Nov. 28      Note to Jock :  
Saturday.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR JOCK,

Do you really think that Hare played Eccles at the age of twenty-three ? He was a fine character actor, but not as fine as all that. The original Eccles was George Honey. Hare played Sam Gerridge. Sizeable bloomers like this deserve showing up in *Ego*. But this eternal blazon shall not be on condition that you send me a letter dulcet and excusatory.

But who am I to talk ? I, who in the *D.E.* describe the eighteenth century as "the age of lace ruffles and lack of brains." Shades of Johnson, Garrick, Goldsmith, Reynolds, Fielding, Pope, and all our friends ! I had, of course, written "drains."

By the way, I had a charming letter this morning from a man wanting to know whether I will settle a dispute his sixteen-year-old daughter is having with some of her school friends. "Is, or is not, Macbeth a butcher ?" Cheque for one guinea enclosed. I know what this means. Sending back the cheque and with it a fifty-guinea essay on S.'s butchers and the differences between them.

Ever,

JAMIE

P.S. Have decided that the blazon is on after all. This will give you the chance to do something better than the old "Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance."

Nov. 24      Supper at the Café Royal with George Mathew :  
Sunday.

G. M. How comes it that a person so obviously devoted to things of the mind as you are should be so scornful about the intellectuals ?

J. A. I'm not !

G. M. The highbrows, then.

J. A. That's the point. Your intellectual and my highbrow are not the same thing.

G. M. What's the difference ?

J. A. A highbrow is a pseudo-intellectual. A mind thinking above its class. A mind in corduroy trousers.

G. M. You mean a braying ass who doesn't know how long his ears are ?

J. A. Exactly. It all boils down to something Basil Macdonald Hastings said years ago. Do you know it ?

G. M. I ought to. You've told me a hundred and fifty times. "There's nothing like consulting a highbrow if you want to hear something that's funny as well as daft."

**Nov. 25** Note from Jock : " You are right, of course, about the  
**Monday.** original Eccles. Shall sleep this week, alone, in sackcloth.  
And eat ashes."

**Nov. 26** To Liverpool yesterday afternoon with Bertie van Thal.  
**Tuesday.** Re-read Gerald Kersh's *Night and the City*, reissued by  
Heinemann. I would sooner have created Harry Fabian,  
the ponce, than any character in modern fiction since Mr Polly.  
Train forty minutes late. Our rooms on the sixth floor (I loathe  
heights) and a hundred yards from the lifts (I nauseate walking).  
Scramble into some clothes and arrive out of breath just in time for  
lecture. Gaunt, hideous, Wesleyan-Methodistical building. Huge  
auditorium. Not a soul in the circle ; handful of people on the  
ground floor. Chairman sends apologies for absence. Choir practice  
in adjacent building. In circumstances I am not at my best, though  
Bertie says I warm up after the first ten minutes. Routine stuff  
about the theatre, and stay on my feet for an hour. Bright spot of  
the evening is the supper afterwards, where I drink a bottle of  
champagne and kiss Ivy St Helier's hand. Sleep well, thanks to  
sleeping tablets and plentiful bedroom provision of whiskey.

Lovely morning, and not too many people on the train. Autumn  
sunshine, which makes me think of Leo. Shake off melancholy and  
bury myself in a book Bertie lends me, Ada M. Ingpen's *Women as  
Letter-writers*. Thoroughly interested in Fanny Kemble's account of  
Macready :

Macready is not pleasant to act with, as he keeps no specific  
time for his exits or entrances, comes on while one is in the middle  
of a soliloquy, and goes off while one is in the middle of a speech to  
him. He growls and prowls, and roams and foams, about the stage  
in every direction, like a tiger in his cage, so that I never know on  
what side of me he means to be ; and keeps up a perpetual snarling  
and grumbling like the aforesaid tiger, so that I never feel quite  
sure that he *has done*, and that it is my turn to speak. I do not  
think fifty pounds a night would hire me to play another engage-  
ment with him ; but I only say, I don't think—fifty pounds a night  
is a consideration, four times a week, and I have not forgotten the  
French proverb, "*Il ne faut pas dire : fontaine, jamais de ton eau  
je ne boirai.*"

All of which reinforces my opinion of Macready as a great actor and  
cad, and Fanny Kemble as a poor actress and a delightful woman.

I do not know how Desdemona might have affected me under  
other circumstances, but my only feeling about acting it with Mr  
Macready is dread of his personal violence. I quail at the idea of

his laying hold of me in those terrible, passionate scenes ; for in *Macbeth* he pinched me black and blue, and almost tore the point lace from my head. I am sure my little finger will be rebroken, and as for that smothering in bed, "Heaven have mercy upon me !" as poor Desdemona says. If that foolish creature wouldn't persist in *talking* long after she has been smothered and stabbed to death, one might escape by the off side of the bed, and leave the bolster to be questioned by Emilia, and apostrophised by Othello ; but she will uplift her testimony after death to her husband's amiable treatment of her, and even the bolster wouldn't be stupid enough for that.

Yes, I feel I should have liked Fanny.

Get back to my desk this morning and find forty dull letters and two bottles of Pol Roger, 1919, the gift of some unknown benefactor.

Nov. 27            Speech at the Foyle Luncheon, Arthur Rank in the  
*Wednesday.*    chair :

Ladies and gentlemen :

The first thing I said to my secretary this morning was, "Ring up Christina Foyle. Ask her where the lunch is, what time, who's in the chair, will there be any drink, how long I am to speak for, and what about ?" He came back with six businesslike answers to these six businesslike questions. Five of them highly satisfactory. I didn't much care for the reply to the sixth question, telling me that I was to speak on the "Function of Criticism." Many years ago, when I was a young man, I asked a doctor something about the function of medicine. He said, "Damn it, young man, I don't know anything about it ! I'm a physician and a surgeon. If you've a cold I'll cure it. If your leg wants cutting off I'll cut it off. But don't bother me with theories." Well, I'm a practising critic, not a theorist. Mr Rank produces a picture. That's his job. I say, "This is a damned good picture," or "This picture's bloody awful." That's my job. And there I stop. I know nothing about the "Function of Criticism."

Now this, my dear friends, doesn't make a speech. At least not a speech that is going to satisfy that Foyle woman. If I sit down now she will think her luncheon wasted. Christina has asked for a talk on the function of criticism. Well, she shall have one, but she mustn't be surprised if it sounds like a talk on film censorship. Astonishingly like a talk I broadcast last Wednesday. And I say boldly : Anybody who heard that talk will want to hear it again, and anybody who missed it ought to be damn' well pleased to be given a second chance.

[Repeat broadcast talk.]

The speech went off better than I could have hoped. The room was full and the audience highly intelligent, so that I managed to be as much above my usual form as I was below it at Liverpool. This in

spite of the fact that just as I rose to speak the toast-master whispered—I didn't know they could—" You've got ten minutes, sir." And my speech was timed to last fifteen. However, I managed.

Nov. 28 Letter from Roger Machell :  
Thursday.

90 Great Russell St.  
London, W.C.1

DEAR MR AGATE,

Discussing your broadcast about the Hays Office and film censorship, a Hollywood magnate who is now in London told me, quite casually, that the use of the word ' behind,' whether as a noun or a preposition, is banned in American films. As a preposition, the phrase ' in back of ' is substituted. He instanced " the garden is in back of the house." When I asked whether in its next Biblical epic Hollywood would make our Lord remark, " Get thee in back of me, Satan," he nodded gravely and said he thought so.

Yours ever,

ROGER MACHELL

Nov. 29 Letter to George Lyttelton :  
Friday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR GEORGE LYTTTELTON,

This is an SOS.

As you know, I have announced *Ego* 9 as the last of the series. And now I'm beginning to be worried. I feel that I shall be in the position of the man who, having burned his boats, looks round for wood to build another fleet. I feel that on the second or third day of the new year I shall clutch at a piece of paper and begin to scribble. Where shall I be able to record some such saying as one I overheard at a theatre last week—" The play I am dying to see is *Scenario de Bergerac* " ? Must I let the rampancy of current error go unchecked ? Must I let publishers announcing *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Cousine Bette* without the article go unrebuked ? What am I to do about the measureless ass who tells me that Tchekhov in his groupings " had one eye on ballet " ? Of what other " philistine with the conscience and equipment of an intellectual "—see the *Times Lit. Supp.* on my first *Ego*—will Bloomsbury go in fear ? What do I do about some delicious letter from you ?

And yet I must stop. I just can't go on working from nine in the morning till three next morning. If I do, something is going to suffer, and there is an implied clause in my newspaper contracts that it shan't be the work I do for them. But I am not going to find giving up easy. I feel that instead of writing new books I shall

begin to chunner and mumble about those that I have written. That I shall become a bore to my friends and a laughing-stock to my enemies. I have tried telling myself that I shall now have time to live. But I have the idea that no writer lives absolutely, for the sheer joy of living. That when he stops writing life becomes practically meaningless. There is probably some tremendous error here, and I wish you would put your finger on it for me. There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream . . . But was there ever a time when for Wordsworth Nature was not just something to write poetry about? And yet . . . The rainbow comes and goes, and lovely is the rose. Well, the rainbow isn't going to stop coming and going or the rose cease to be lovely because J. A. no longer puts on paper his piddling views about them. You see, I have some rudiments of sanity left.

The matter has been brought to a head by a letter from a Naval captain which I received this morning. The writer tells me of his grandfather's diary, which he kept for thirty-four years, beginning in 1854. There is, it seems, a great deal about the theatre in it, with accounts of what the old gentleman thought of G. V. Brook's Othello, Irving's Hamlet, and Sarah Bernhardt's Lady Macbeth!!! You know my passion for rescuing things from oblivion. If the whole diary is publishable I shall get Bertie van Thal to do it. But suppose there are half a dozen lucky shots, sentences of miraculous felicity, what do I do about these?

Of course I know the real remedy. This is that people who write and tell me how enraptured they are with my diary should show their rapture in a tangible way. That old ladies in Tunbridge Wells doting on me should stop leaving their property to cats' homes and leave it to J. A. I don't insist on their dying; let them hand over the cash and go on doting. Endow me and I will never enter another English theatre. Endow me handsomely and I will never again look at a British film. Make the endowment handsome enough and I will never open a new book in any language. I lunched yesterday with Fred Dehn, father of my godson Paul. He has just sold his business for a figure with an incredible number of noughts after it. Why can't I sell my newspaper connections? Given the leisure, I could Egotise for a long time yet.

No, I don't think there is anything to be done about it. What is the Latin for 'diarist'? I am not at all sure that instead of printing "The End" I shan't put:

"*Qualis* something-or-other *pereo*!"

Ever,

JAMES AGATE

Nov. 30     I get so annoyed when people talk about talent that  
Saturday.     cannot get an opening. I don't believe a word of it. I  
                 don't believe there is one scrap of genuine talent that  
                 doesn't find its way, provided the owner of the talent is ready to do

his part. I have no use whatever for the creator of masterpieces who sits at home waiting for the world to come to him when he should be putting on his coat and sallying forth to ram his masterpieces down the public's throat. Some six weeks ago I saw in the manager's office of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, a delightful painting by a boy of fourteen, one Gerald Grimes, son of the caricaturist. I doubt whether Dufy, who seems to be the boy's master, did as well at this age. I commissioned a painting on the spot, if you can call a fiver a commission. I collected it on Monday, and have now got three more commissions for him. Jock wants him to paint a bit of Covent Garden market, Jack de Leon would like a picture of the "Q" Theatre, and Stanley Rubinstein leaves the subject to the artist. I will have nothing to do with the argument that the boy was lucky in that his work caught my attention. The point is that he managed to interest Lovat Fraser, who liked a picture of his well enough to hang it in his office, where, if I hadn't seen it, somebody else would have done.

My experience of life tells me that any man of talent who is a failure deserves to be a failure. Leo? Whoever tried to help Leo was instantly and wittily destroyed.

*Dec. 1* Motored with Michael Russell-Smith to Haywards Heath,  
*Sunday.* the occasion being the birthday of my old friend Helen Dehn, Paul's mother. Lovely day of autumn, not winter, sunshine, with a gentle wind in which a few russet leaves fluttered bravely, like old actresses. Michael told us how when he was sixteen he met Mrs Patrick Campbell in Montreal. She said, "Oh, my dear boy, why do you take dope?" He said, "But I don't." Whereupon she intoned, "Then what tragedy you must have known to have eyes like that!"

*Dec. 2* A letter from Jock  
*Monday.*

88 King Street  
Covent Garden, W.C.2

DEAR JAMIE,

You flatter me—a most unusual thing for you to do. I think I prefer your more usual critical praise!

I can't agree that I *commence à percer* so very much. 'Tis true that since last May I have been doing a monthly talk on the London theatre, which is translated into ten different European languages and sent out in those languages (but not by me!).

'Tis also true that I have just been appointed English corre-

spondent to *La Revue Théâtrale*, a lofty-browed Paris quarterly whose *Comité Fondateur* of fourteen contains Gaston Baty, Jean-Jacques Bernard, Jean Cocteau, Fernand Crommelynck, Charles Dullin, Louis Jouvet, Stève Passeur, Michel Saint-Denis, Armand Salacrou, and Charles Vildrac, and whose second issue contains the text of a new play by André Obey.

'Tis still more true that an incomparably less lofty-browed English publication called *The London Annual* has just appeared containing a full-dress review of the year by me (but only a *réchauffé* of my *News Chronicle* stuff)—a full-dress attack on you (muddled and insufficiently witty for such a target)—and a page of Notes on Contributors which embarrassingly opines of me as a dramatic critic that I am “the best in the business.” It goes on: “He is a Scotsman, and was at one time secretary to James Agate, another critic.” (!)

This is, of course, havers—and rude havers—and silly havers. Only last Friday I was giving an hour's talk to fifty Service officers (men and women) on a Leave Course; and one of them got up and asked me who were the tip-top dramatic critics. I replied, “That's easy. Agate of the *Sunday Times*, Brown of the *Observer*, and Cookman of *The Times*. There you have them—the A, B, and C of dramatic criticism.” A twinkling-eyed Marine sprang up thereon, and said, “And whom would you call the D, sir?” Whereupon, in less time than it takes to twinkle back, I said, “Desmond MacCarthy of course! Any more questions?”

By the way, don't try to be in two rendezvous at once, the way you were last night at supper. Bad for anybody. I've given it up now I've turned forty, and you should be giving it up now you're turning seventy.

Ever,  
JOCK

I reply :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR JOCK,

Some forty years ago one of the music-hall comedians—either Albert Chevalier or Leo Dryden,—had a song about A Fallen Star. If mine has not fallen, it is falling. Let me now a tale unfold to harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, and do something or other to thy knotted and combined locks. That excellent French paper *Spectateur* commissioned an article from me on the subject of Olivier's *Lear*, the publishing date to coincide with Larry's visit to Paris. This morning the paper's London representative bunged the article back at me with a note from the French editor :

“J'ai bien reçu l'article de M. Agate. Je me vois dans l'obligation de vous le retourner, celui-ci n'étant pas utilisable. En effet,

il ne peut intéresser qu'un public anglais, et me semble même pour celui-ci d'une qualité discutable."

Well, Jock, I've had a pretty long run. It will be forty years next month since I was taken on by the *Manchester Guardian*, having served a year's apprenticeship with the *Daily Dispatch*. May it be forty years before any editor, French, Turkish, or Chinese, uses the word *discutable* about an article of yours.

More in anger than in sorrow,

JAMIE

*Dec. 3 Tuesday.* The *Daily Express* rang up to ask if I could give them a quotation which should be at the same time one of my favourites and also unhackneyed. Sent them this :

Gawd bless this world ! Whatever she 'ath done—  
Excep' when awful long—I've found it good.  
So write, before I die, "'E liked it all !"

*Dec. 4 Wednesday.* The diaries of the Naval captain's grandfather—Henry Spencer Ashbee—have arrived, and I permit myself an

### INTAGLIO

*February 18, 1874.* George Cruikshank came to me to-day to inspect the frontispiece of a book which I have, *The Cherub, or Guardian of Female Innocence*, drawn and etched by his father, Isaac Cruikshank. The book was published in the same year (1792) in which George C. was born. What a wonderful man is this George Cruikshank, taking to account his age, 84 years, and the immense quantity of work which he has done. I was prepared to see a decrepit old man, but it was quite the contrary. The great artist is still a young man in the possession of all his powers, both physical and mental, upright in carriage, quick in movement, ready and sprightly in conversation. His face, indeed, retains still its beauty, for the features are regular and well formed and not at all warped by age. But the most striking thing is his wonderful bright and keen blue eyes, which are as clear and piercing as of a young man in the prime of life. Mr Cruikshank seems to observe and grasp everything by his wonderful eyes. His conversation is not refined, but is most interesting as long as he can be kept upon his art and upon the recollections of the great literary men with whom he has had to do during his lengthy career. Of all these, Charles Dickens is he of whom he has least good to say. To him, indeed, he scarcely accords any originality, and seems to look on him as a sorry rascal. In the praise of Charles Lamb he was very warm.

George Cruikshank is the great prophet of teetotalism. This is his weak point, from which it is difficult to keep him away, and to which he slips back at any and every moment during the most interesting part of a conversation. His experiences of the effects of



the bottle, it must be confessed, are sad enough. His father and brother Robert shortened their lives by drink, and the list of literary men whose great talents have been paralysed and their careers prematurely closed through intemperance, which Mr Cruikshank has at his finger-ends, is quite appalling. He is a strict teetotaler himself, not having drunk any alcoholic drinks for many years. Is the retention of his faculties in their almost pristine freshness to be attributed to this determined teetotalism?

*March 8, 1874.* Mr George Cruikshank was to have dined with us to-day, but could not come till eight o'clock, when he brought a book with him for our children. He saw for the first time the charming child's book *Springinsfeld* von Oscar Pletsch, with which he was much delighted, looked every plate through from first to last, and exclaimed, "I should like to have done this book." How fond he is of children! He seems to be wanting always to be doing something for them, something to promote their happiness. What a fund of information there is in the old man, and how delightfully he imparts his gossip! What a checkered life his has been! He wanted, as a youth, to go to sea. Then he had nearly become an actor, tried to get into Drury Lane Theatre as a scene painter in order that he might be able, as he says, "to creep on to the stage." He says he never had any proper instruction in his art, which, considering the wondrous proficiency to which he has attained, seems almost incredible. What a host of celebrated people he has known—John Kemble, Mrs Siddons, Barham, Grimaldi, Greenwood of Sadler's Wells notoriety, Dickens—Dickens, yes, of him he cannot speak well, but considers him mad. The fact is he is intimate with Mrs Dickens, who was undoubtedly badly treated by her husband. A most entertaining old man truly, and endowed with great dramatic power. To see him imitate Grimaldi and John Kemble brings one back to palmy days of the stage. Had he been an actor he would certainly have been a great one. He firmly believes (as every truly great man must) in himself, and this without one spark of egotism. "Had I gone to sea," he exclaimed, "I should either have gone down or become an admiral!"

*December 13, 1874.* I went with Elizabeth Collins and wife to the Lyceum to see *Hamlet*. Irving took Hamlet, Chippendale Polonius, and Compston 1st Gravedigger. The two latter were not to be surpassed, but Irving, well as he undoubtedly sustains the part, came far short of my *beau idéal*. He avoids points,<sup>1</sup> and has succeeded wonderfully in doing away with his mannerisms, but altogether his performance, in spite of the excitement which it is causing, can not be ranked higher than a good average one. Miss Bateman as Ophelia was sinply villainous.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Clement Scott's notice in the *Daily Telegraph* the morning after the first performance: "Those who have seen other Hamlets are aghast. Mr Irving is missing his point, he is neglecting his opportunities."

*April 21, 1875.* Went with Elizabeth and Charles to see the Italian actor Salvini in *Othello*. A finer performance as far as Salvini was concerned I do not recollect ever having seen. S. is most easy and graceful, even in his movements, has a full, rich, melodious voice, is calm and subdued in his play until passion is really required, and then he is terrible. His countenance is most flexible. Every feature, but more particularly the eyes, is expressive, and the ease and force with which he depicts on his countenance the thoughts which Iago's insinuations suggest to him are simply inimitable. His ability to portray love is as great as it is to show forth hate, and in the early scenes he was as charming as in the later ones he was terrible. He certainly is a great artist, and it is not to be wondered at that our own actors have been anxious to see him. The way in which they have received him does them great credit, both as men and as artists. Desdemona was fairly interpreted, but Iago and Roderigo were as badly acted as they could possibly be.

*February 25, 1880.* Just returned from the Théâtre Français, where I assisted, as the French say, at the crowning of the bust of Victor Hugo. At the conclusion of *Hernani*, a drama which I do not like, the curtain again rose after a short pause. In the centre of the stage was the bust of Victor Hugo, and around it were grouped the company of the Comédie Française, with Sarah Bernhardt in front of it. She recited some verses written by François Coppée for the occasion, and then placed the palm branch which she held in her left hand upon the statue. The enthusiasm did not seem to me to be very great. In a box to the right of the stage, looking towards it from the auditorium, were the daughter-in-law of Hugo and his grandchildren. Victor Hugo, although demanded, did not appear. The whole ceremony was very French.

*April 25, 1882.* Went with Elizabeth and Charley to the Lyceum to see *Romeo and Juliet*. H. Irving as Romeo was abominable, not a redeeming feature in his whole performance, which frequently made me laugh; Ellen Terry a good Juliet, better than I expected. She is an actress of the head, not of the heart, and yet she performed Juliet admirably. Terriss very good as Mercutio, perhaps a little too boisterous. The *mise en scène* was too beautiful, and, to my mind, the action was hampered by the superabundance of accessories.

*July 13, 1883.* On Friday took Elizabeth and Frances to the Lyceum to see *Hamlet*, which I have seen before with the same cast. Ellen Terry as ever charming. A more perfect and more pleasant Ophelia (the part in my estimation is not a pleasant one) I do not think possible. Howe's Polonius, if not marked by originality or distinctiveness, is straightforward, clear, unassuming, and pithy. Irving more objectionable than ever, indistinct, stilted, angular,

incorrect in conception, full of mannerism, no spontaneity, no *abandon*. The *man* is never there, the *actor* for ever present. It is inconceivable to me how the British public, high and low, can so worship Henry Irving, whom I cannot but consider a very bad actor.

*February 14, 1884.* Took Elizabeth and Frances to the Savoy Theatre to see the *Princess Ida*, by far the weakest comic opera of Gilbert and Sullivan which has yet appeared. Much more might have been made out of the Princess, and of the music scarcely a bar struck me as original. Barrington's part did not suit him. The same may be said of Miss Braham. Grossmith was as usual admirable, in spite of his want of voice, but he had not enough to do. The *mise en scène* as usual most beautiful.

*March 29, 1884.* *The Scrap of Paper* at St James's is a clever adaptation of a very clever piece, very well acted. Hare is inimitable both in get-up and rendering of his part. Kendal is as good as I have ever seen him. Mrs Kendal good of course, although she lacks *abandon*. She is always acting and hoping that you are admiring her.

*September 17, 1884.* To the Porte St Martin with Arnold and his wife to see *Macbeth*—Sarah Bernhardt and Marais. The costumes were horrible—as ugly and tasteless as they were untrue, and the *mise en scène* poor in the extreme; the translation literal and frequently trivial and with modern slang. But the play, barring the long *entr'actes*, went briskly and the supernatural scenes not ludicrous. Marais was a very fair Macbeth; and, although nearly all the English points were missed, rendered the part in a very satisfactory manner. Sarah lacked the stiffness and coldness of the great Scotch lady, and was entirely deficient in dignity as the queen. Indeed, she never threw off the *demi-monde* impression for a moment. Her costume was that of an acrobat. She was subtle and serpentine, had the lure of the harlot more than the influence of the strong-minded consort, was indeed Fédora or Froufrou, never Lady Macbeth. Yet, with all this utterly un-English bearing, her performance was most powerful, and she held me completely every moment she was on the stage. Her sleep-walking scene was one of the finest things I have seen. The masculine vigour which one looks for in Lady Macbeth was never attained, but on the other hand a subtlety all her own, and certainly not to be found in any living English actress, lent to her performance a charm and an originality which made one overlook all the other drawbacks. The last act—the arrival of Birnam wood, etc., where some stage accessories are needed—was feeble, and I cannot believe that the French audience unfamiliar with the plot of the play could have understood the realisation of the Witches' prediction. Altogether I was most agreeably surprised, and apart from the long waits I spent a most

enjoyable evening. The theatre itself is one of the most comfortless and inconvenient in Paris, and were a panic to arise no one could be saved.

Dec. 5 Letter to Neville Cardus :  
Thursday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR NEVILLE,

"From Our Special Correspondent." But neither you nor *The Times* can fool me. I read your column on the first and second days' play at Brisbane and wasn't quite sure. To-day comes your account of England's first knock, and *I know*. If there were a cricket reporter of this calibre in this country I should have heard of him. Which means that *The Times* has not sent out a man to report the Tests. Therefore he must be in Australia. Now I just don't believe that that land of half-wits and whole cricketers has any writer of this class except you. Therefore YOU are "Our Special Correspondent." Q.E.D.

Besides, the stuff is full of fingerprints. (Know what I mean ?) Of Hammond : "Using his bat like an old Roman centurion's shield." Of Compton : "He played with a lovely gallantry." Of the weather : "Darkness covered the earth, then a storm of awful grandeur flooded and submerged deep the field. To describe it would tax the language of the Old Testament and Joseph Conrad." You didn't really think to diddle me, did you ?

But might you not have dropped a hint ? Why not a sentence for your James's private eye ? Something about Bedser's action reminding you of Brahms's melodic line ? In the meantime know that your articles are tremendously appreciated here, and that I am continually being asked if I know who is writing them. My reply is "a headshake and the pronouncing of some doubtful phrase." But to you, old mole, my warmest felicitations.

Ever,

JAMES

Dec. 6 To-night at 7.45 Alexis Kligerman 'made' the Albert  
Friday. Hall. This is a long trek from the "Q" Theatre. (See  
*Ego* 6, p. 15.) "The Emperor," with Malcolm Sargent  
and the L.S.O. Played very well, with a *cantabile* he did not have  
before, acquiring which, however, he seems to have lost some of his  
fire. Perhaps the size of the hall and the occasion were a trifle on the  
big side. He told me when I went round afterwards that this was his  
first performance of the concerto. Said that he was playing in Derby  
to-morrow, Pontefract on Sunday, and Sunderland on Tuesday.

Which suggests that he will be able to pay his laundry bill, which is more than I can do.

Dec. 7            Note from Jock :  
Saturday.

88 King Street  
Covent Garden, W.C.2

DEAR JAMIE GUMMIDGE,

Don't be daft.

'Tis true, too, that I have just been asked for the first Christmas in twenty Christmases to the luncheon party at the Olympia Circus.

'Tis true, moreover, that by the same post I am invited to write an article on Theatre (Great Britain) in the last Ten Years for the next edition of the *ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA*.

But, on the other hand, hark at what happened last night as ever was. I was supping alone *Au Petit Savoyard* in a practically empty room, when, from the other corner, I heard a snatch of conversation between a Polish officer and his girl-friend. The Pole had obviously been declaring that our theatre criticism was in a bad way, for what the girl said was exactly this (I wrote it down there and then): "Oh, no, but you must except James Agate of the *Sunday Times*. Now he just can't be overlooked—by far the best of them—and, what's more, he's the only one of them with any chance of immortality, you know, ranking with Hazlitt and those few . . ." Wherewith I paid my bill and came out into the black wet night!

So, you see, *ce vieillard commence à s'immortaliser !*

Ever,

JOCK

To which I reply :

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

BUT JOCK DEAR,

I am like a child who, given one toy, clamours for another. I am not in the running with Hazlitt. In the spectrum of dramatology I approximate to mauve, and you remember Whistler's "Mauve is only pink trying to be purple." Compared with Hazlitt my purplest passages are a sickly puce. And then I haven't Shaw's knowledge, Max's wit, Walkley's urbanity, Montague's style. Besides, I don't particularly want the stuff to live. I might have wanted if there had been an Irving to write about, but there hasn't. I tell you, Jock, that I would give the whole of Olivier, Richardson, Wolfitt, and Gielgud for the smile the Old Man gave the little serving maid at his first entry in *The Bells*. All the same, I am sending with this note a copy of *The Contemporary Theatre*, 1919.

Nicely printed, I think, but with two gratuitous commas on pages 28 and 88 which you will ignore.

Besides, my dear boy, in a sense dramatic criticism must always be parasitic. The writer of it is working over and recasting the stuff of other people's brains. *Ego* is the result of my own brain. Alone I did it, reckoning as nothing, in the Ellistonian sense, the help I got from Edward, Leo, George Lyttelton, Jock. I would like a hundred years hence to be put on the same shelf with Pepys and Evelyn. Your *Enc. Brit.* says of the latter, "Written with no thought of publication, it embodies the frankest expression of its author's opinions, and affords much curious and interesting information which the historian would have probably passed over, but which throws a strong light upon the customs and feelings of the age." Substitute "With every eye to publication," and doesn't this passage hold equally well of me? In some respects I am a better diarist than either P. or E. I have had no Plague and no Fire to help me. The 1939-45 war? It is hardly mentioned. There is no reference to politics. *Ego* is as non-political as the Savage Club, about which I said to those poor fellows from East Grinstead when they dined with us: "We are entirely non-political. There is not a single Savage who would object to sitting at table next to some unwashed Communist ruffian or even a member of the present Government." *Ego* is a gold brick made from no straw. It may live or it may not. It would be nice if it did. If it doesn't, the nine volumes will make an excellent trouser-press.

Now that I am finishing the damned thing I realise that diary-writing isn't wholly good for one, that too much of it leads to living for one's diary instead of living for the fun of living as ordinary people do. There was a time when to watch my little horse win a class put me on the highest point of being. But I seem to have lost this. They are to revive the International Horse Show at Olympia next year, and in the ordinary way of things I should be looking forward to having something for the Novice Class. I shan't have anything because my filly is only two. But if she were three and won the class I should not be greatly excited. What is the good of anything if you have nowhere to write about it?

To be less serious, did you see the announcement in to-day's *Telegraph* that some French chemist has found a way to split the atom into four? About which some ass at the Sorbonne said, "These discoveries—tri-fission and quadri-fission of the atom of uranium—would permit of important progress in the field of research into the use of atomic energy for peaceful ends." To which, of course, the only answer is Beachcomber's "Tra-la-la!"

Ever,

JAMIE

P.S. Did you see that Richard Capell calls Kligerman "an exceptionally fine pianist"?

**Dec. 8 Sunday.** Took tea with Lady Reid, Maurice Baring's sister, the occasion being the presentation to me of the big Littré which Maurice wanted me to have. She also gave me one of his treasured possessions, a photograph taken in 1879 of Sarah as Doña Sol in *Hernani*, wearing her little silver crown. When I got home I turned up Maurice on Sarah. Yes, I know I'm a bore. "I will not sink without a struggle into that period when a man begins to bore young people by raving to them about mimes whom they never saw" (Max Beerbohm). But I don't pretend to write for young people. What have I to do with youth? Therefore, for my own pleasure, and because Maurice would like it, I set down here the unforgettable ending to the essay on Sarah in *Punch and Judy*. It is twenty years since this was published, and I cannot believe that many people do as I do, walk about their flats murmuring chunks of it by heart :

When in the future people will say, "But you should have heard Sarah Bernhardt in the part!" the newcomers will probably shrug their shoulders and say, "Oh, we know all about that!"

But they will not know, nor will anybody be able to tell them or explain to them what Sarah Bernhardt could do with a modulated inflexion, a *trait de voix*, a look, a gesture, a cry, a smile, a sigh, nor what majesty, poetry and music she could suggest by the rhythm of her movements and her attitudes, what it was like to hear her speak verse, to say words such as :

Songe, songe, Céphise, à cette nuit cruelle,

or,

Si tu veux faisons un rêve.

Nobody will be able to tell them, because, in spite of the gramophone and the cinematograph, the actor's art dies almost wholly with the actor. It is short-lived, but only relatively short-lived; and nobody understood that better than Sarah Bernhardt, one of whose mottoes was "Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse."

(It was tempered by another: "Quand même.")

On the loom of things the poems of Homer are only a little less ephemeral than a leading article, and the art of a Phidias is, after all, as perishable as the sketches of a 'lightning' music-hall artist.

Le temps passe. Tout meurt. Le marbre même s'use.  
Agrigente n'est plus qu'une ombre, et Syracuse  
Dort sous le bleu linceul de son ciel indulgent.

The most enduring monuments, the most astounding miracles of beauty achieved by the art and craft of man, are but as flotsam, drifting for a little while upon the stream of Time; and with it now there is a strange russet leaf, the name of Sarah Bernhardt.

**Dec. 9** Have decided to have one last fling at all I hate in modern  
**Monday.** art. Am unloading the following on the *S.T.* :

Somebody having sent me Walkley's *Dramatic Criticism*, being three lectures delivered by him at the Royal Institution in 1908, I open the book and read :

"A picture, whatever else it does, must first please the eye ; music, whatever else it does, must first please the ear. And pleasure of the senses—this is the important point—is only to be had at the price of perpetual change ; for it is an elementary physiological law that the mere repetition of the same stimulus will not be followed by the same pleasurable reaction. Contrast art, in this respect, with *pure* science or with *fundamental* morals. Pure science does not change, and cannot, so long as man remains as we know him. Have not two and two always made four, two sides of a triangle always been greater than the third, two bodies in space always attracted one another inversely as the square of the distance between them ? And, so long as man remains in society as we know it, the first principles of conduct cannot change : Thou shalt not kill, steal, bear false witness against thy neighbour. Not so with art. Our pleasure-sense becomes sharpened by use, more subtle, more exacting. In order to procure the same thrill we are driven to vary and to intensify the exciting cause ; or, as Mr Arthur Balfour has pithily expressed it in one of those amiable digressions with which he has enlivened his *Foundations of Belief*—he is actually speaking of music, but the statement may be generalised—'A steady level of æsthetic sensation can only be maintained by increasing doses of æsthetic stimulant.' "

So far, so good. But suppose stimulation has reached saturation-point—a vile phrase, but let it go. Does this justify the resort to false stimulants ? Are the makers, I sometimes feel inclined to say fakers, of modern art, music, and poetry in the position of the man who, no longer getting a kick out of brandy, has resort to methylated spirits ? Suppose one of two things. Suppose (*a*) that everything that can be drawn, sung, or said in the old way has been drawn, sung, said. In parenthesis let me insist with some firmness that I do not believe this. Now suppose (*b*) that while some humdrum clods still contrive to find sufficing stimulant along the old lines there exists a type of progressive artist whom the old lines no longer excite. (I shall ignore the humbugs who try to disguise poverty of talent by dressing it up in new clothes.) Is an artist belonging to type (*b*), having exhausted the pleasing, entitled to embrace the unpleasing ? And does the unpleasing, by virtue of that embrace, take on acceptability ? In Walkley's day the artist's job was to provide pleasure. If he wanted to play the artistic fool he could do it in's own house. What pleasure, what delight is the shade of A. B. W. discovering in the new and lying anatomies, ear-splitting atonalities, untunable assonances ? Can it be that that great critic was wrong to confine himself to two senses ? Is it



possible that Picasso tickles the palate, Bartók reeks of odious savours sweet, and imagist poetry, printed in Braille, enchants the finger-tips? Last, can it be that the arts have said good-bye to the senses? That we are to recognise them as handmaids of the First Cause, and as such part of that mathematical conception of the universe which has nothing to do with pleasing or displeasing?

On Christmas Day I received from my favourite photographer a self-picture showing him to be possessed of three eyes, two noses, and four beards. Far be it from me to say that this eccentricity, while not pleasing in the accepted sense, failed to achieve some other of the qualities which Walkley conceded to a picture. It was 'amusing'; it tacitly recognised one as a modernist who can laugh at the right things in the right way; in one's immediate circle it excited comment. Now if I make the full allowance in the case of the photographic art must I not in logic make it for all the others? In the theatre must I not look sympathetically on the playwright who finds his "increasing stimulant" in the subconscious, and writes a verse drama about it for intellectuals who can't act and never will? Councils of Five, Groups of Art, and all the Little Theatres in Town would tumble over themselves to secure a piece of pretentious nonsense that I should hate but must in logic praise.

This brings me to the old question of the function of the critic. Here I am in 100 per cent. agreement with A. B. W. "It is not the dramatic critic's trade to make plays, or to teach the way to make plays. It is the function of criticism not to inculcate methods, but to appraise results; to examine the thing done, not the way to do it. It is, in short, the evaluation of pleasurable impressions." (Still harping on that demoded matter of pleasure!) But pleasurable to whom? To the critic, of course, who is the only person in the audience for whom he can speak. Many people have complained about dramatic notices that they are too much concerned with the writer and too little with the play; they do not realise that what they are looking for is not a dramatic critic but a theatrical plumber! <sup>1</sup> It is of this that Anatole France was thinking when he said, "In order to be frank the critic ought to say, 'Gentlemen, I am about to speak of myself *apropos* of Shakespeare, or Racine, or Pascal, or Goethe—by no means a bad opportunity.'" Criticism is not an exact science like algebra or chemistry. Criticism is the knack of communicating to others the kind and amount of delight the critic has received from a work of art, or one of skilful and popular contrivance. The knack, too, of spotting and slaying the bogus and pretentious, even if all the world's pseudo-intellectuals are on their knees before it, high brow to low floor.

Dec. 10 Letter from George Lyttelton :  
Tuesday.

Grundisburgh  
Suffolk

DEAR JAMES,

At last that ill-bred and dilatory germ seems to be definitely in retreat, and I am sitting up and taking the bleak nourishment with which a rebellious liver is cajoled into a sulky resumption of its duties. I hope you didn't think I was in the grip of :

Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs,  
Intestine stone and ulcer, colic pangs,  
Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy,  
And moonstruck madness, pining atrophy, etc.

By the way, to drop for a moment into blasphemy, I have discovered the two worst lines in *Paradise Lost*—viz., apropos of Noah and Sodom and Gomorrah :

At length a reverend sire among them came  
And of their doings great dislike declared.

But, excluding the occasional puns and flops (e.g., "No fear lest dinner cool"), what an extraordinary level of majesty and rhythm the grim old man maintains in his "slow planetary wheelings." The best short summary of *P.L.* was made by a Russian soldier who, according to Maurice Baring, loved it "because it makes you laugh and cry."

With regard to your SOS, I am afraid, my dear James, I have no comfort to bring you. Of course you work far too hard, and equally of course you always will. How can you stop writing? It isn't merely something you do, it is you or, at least, an inalienable part of you. Your writing has many qualities, as your admirers (and enemies) have often said, but, in the ultimate analysis, what stands out above, behind, beneath all the rest is your *integrity*—by which I mean that every word you write has all of J. A. in it and nothing, for all your quotations, of anybody else. All the care you take is to put down with vivid exactness what you think at the moment. You never tone down or dress up in order to placate, or disarm, or please anyone but yourself. And that, besides making you one of a small and select company, means two things—continuous cerebration (which is exhausting) and continual delight (which outweighs all else) when, as you know quite well you often do, you hit the bull's-eye. And when this urge to express is backed by your other leading characteristic—an intense savour of the quality of all that you come across in literature and drama and music and life—well, the case is hopeless! Your proposal to stop commenting is on all fours with Lamb and some friend resolving one evening to give up snuff, and then each finding the other early next morning searching for their respective snuff-boxes in the

bushes where they had thrown them. The day after you have burnt your pens and sold your typewriter you will be writing with a piece of coal. What happened before when the doctor told you to stop writing? What is the alternative? To cultivate a Wordsworthian "wise passiveness"? I can't see it. Haydon, being insane, could picture the Duke of Wellington "musing" on the field of Waterloo. But even he could not have conceived of J. A. musing in Grape Street. It is hard that you can't doff any of your harness and that there is no comfortable loose box well supplied with hay awaiting you. After all, you have served the stage more diligently than many have served the State who end up with some fat sinecure or pension.

Meanwhile the seed sown by J. A. sprouts. Isn't it your godson whose play is being broadcast this evening? About a schoolboy "who loved beauty and hated pedants"?—two of the main points of his godfather's creed (though astonishingly patient with pedagogues!).

I have had a more concentrated dose of the wireless lately than ever before. What a lot of Saharas there are with no oasis, long periods when there is really nothing to listen to that helps one, in Johnson's words, "to enjoy or to endure life." There is, of course, that Frenchman who, literally, never stops talking day or night. I think he must be doing it for a bet, except that he must have won it years ago. And I listened twice to the whole of *Itma*. I remember in one of the *Egos* an impressive posse of your friends who told you you were wrong in not thinking *Itma* very funny. Well, put this to them now. The readiness of a Colonel Blimp to have a drink and to mishear any remark as an invitation to do so may be funny enough once or twice, but half a dozen times *every* Thursday for literally years?? Again the audience splits its sides when A asks B if he will have a sninch of puff. So did I—in 1892. Has the common man (to whose tastes and standards we must to-day all bow down or be considered highbrow or hidebound) in his ascent of Parnassus only just reached the modest height of "Kinquering Kongs"? I think Dan Leno and Little Tich and Pélissier did better.

I must stop. On re-reading I have misgivings about my dogmatics about your personality (repulsive word). *Sich imper-ence*, you may well think. But you are a forgiving man except to those who talk nonsense, and if I have done that I'll eat my head with more than grimwiggian conviction!

Yours ever,

GEORGE LYTTTELTON

P.S. A friend tells me that in an obituary of J. K. Mosley the printer gave the title of one of his books as *The Impossibility of God*. As my friend says, it is really the theologians' fault for inventing such a word as 'impassibility,' of which none but they knows the meaning.

Dec. 11 Letter to George Lyttelton :  
Wednesday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR GEORGE,

*Opus operatum est.* I am utterly determined to wind up the thing. Your letter, giving me that Nunc Dimittissy feeling, has done the trick. But the book had been ending for some time and of its own accord. Like the last movement of a Concerto, it has *finis* written all over it.

Besides, I have a horror of people who won't stop when they've finished. Like the guest who can't make up his mind to go. Do you know that wonderful passage in the story of Jack Sheppard in the *Newgate Calendar* ? He had got out of gaol and lowered himself on to the turner's leads, a house adjoining the prison. Fortunately the garret door was open. The boy stole down two pair of stairs and heard company talking in a room, the door being open. Here is Jack's own account : " My irons gave a small clink, which made a woman cry, ' Lord ! what noise is that ? ' A man replied, ' Perhaps the dog or cat,' and so it went off." Jack returned to the garret, and being terribly fatigued laid himself down for two hours. Then once more he crept down to where the company were, " and heard a gentleman taking his leave, being very importunate to be gone, saying he had disappointed some friends by not going home sooner. In about three-quarters more, the gentleman took leave and went." I intend to take leave and go at once, though the manner of the exit is not yet settled. The organ close ? The nonchalant touch ? 'Prospero or Eulenspiegel ? I shall leave that to to-morrow's inspiration.

The future stretches before me like a desert. No more the juice of Holborn's Grape Street . . . I shall, of course, have leisure for private quarrels. But what I like is public ones. Glancing through one of last week's novels, I came across a description of Réjane as possessing " a wide-awake little mug." But that's *my* phrase, *my* rendering of Sarcey's " petite frimousse éveillée." The authors go on to quote the French, and *get it wrong*. They print the last word " eveiller." Of course, I can and shall cane them in the *Express*. But what's the good of that ? When I pillory anybody or anything I want it to be not for a day, but for an age. Wherefore I have started to toy seriously with the idea of a Postscript. (Suppose the King of Spain makes me a Knight of the Golden Fleece ? And why shouldn't he ?) Yes, a Postscript's the thing. Perhaps on the lines of " Walt Whitman's Last " in which, you remember, the old boy likened himself to Lear. So if you read of my being arrested for going up to citizens in Piccadilly Circus and saying, " Ha ! Goneril with a white beard ! " you will know that Bedlam is henceforth the address of

Your old friend,

JAMES AGATE

P.S. Have just had a brain-wave. This is to lock the stable door *now* by getting Harrap's to announce *Ego* 8 as "the penultimate instalment of Agate's Diary." With the implication, of course, of *Ego* 9 as the last instalment. This will be effective in two ways. First, the horse won't be able to get out. Second, it will stop the mouths of reviewers yapping about this tedious old fool going on for ever.

P.P.S. I may not have the courage to wind up with the end of the year. I may go on yapping until the spring. The first entry in *Ego* is dated June 2, 1919. I seem to see the date June 1, 1919, hanging in the air. Very much as Macbeth saw the dagger. They marshal me the way that I am going, since they complete the fifteen years' cycle. Even if I finish a shade earlier I feel that I shall cheat a little and tell the printer to date the last entry June 1, 1919.

Dec. 12 Letter to Edgar Lustgarten :  
Thursday.

Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2

DEAR EDGAR,

As you are the only person of my acquaintance who really knows his Damon Runyon, I have a proposition for you. This is that you should do what Cerfberr and Christophe did for Balzac—compile a Repertory of all the characters in the stories. There are times when I must *at once* renew acquaintance with Angie the Ox, Sam the Gonoph, Dave the Dude, The Lemon Drop Kid, Milk Ear Willie, Joe the Joker, and Big Nig, not to mention Mesdames Beulah Beauregard, Cutie Singleton, Billy Perry, Missouri Martin, Lola Sapola, and so on. I can generally put my hand on them, but not always. Now if there were a Repertory one would be in no trouble.

Here is the model :

HARRY THE HORSE. A character from Brooklyn who is mobbed up with other characters such as Spanish John and Little Isadore. With these two and Educated Edmund, and at the request of Mr Jabez Tuesday, makes a personal call on Miss Amelia Bodkin with the object of recovering certain letters which would be very embarrassing to Mr Tuesday if Miss Valerie Scarwater, to whom he is affianced, should get a wrong notion of their nature (*Breach of Promise*). In the spring of 1919 and in company with Spanish John and Little Isadore kidnaps a rich bookmaker (*The Snatching of Bookie Bob*). Hires Big Butch to open a safe in an office in West Eighteenth Street containing money deposited by a personal friend who is the paymaster for the company (*Butch Minds the Baby*).

Or

**THE BRAIN.** Right name, Armand Rosenthal. A large operator in gambling and a collector of dolls, which include Doris Clare, Cynthia Harris, and Bobby Baker, in addition to his ever-loving wife, Charlotte. Okays Feet Samuels with Dr Bodeeker, to whom Feet wishes to sell his body (*A Very Honourable Guy*). Presses Homer Swing for payment and is carved up more than somewhat by Daffy Jack. Dies in the basement room of a brick-layer's widow with five children to whom he leaves his money (*The Brain Goes Home*).

What about it ?

Ever,  
JIMMIE

*Dec. 14* In a letter from Delhi : "In Lahore last week I  
*Saturday.* found a copy of *Ego 7*. Does it ever give you a curious feeling to think that at this moment you may be being read in Clapham, New Orleans, Lima, and Saidu, the capital of Swat ? "

*Dec. 16* Letter from Neville Cardus :  
*Monday.*

*Sydney*

MY DEAR JAMES,

From your review of Warner's book, *Lord's* : "Ranji waved a conjurer's wand, and a small boy picked the magic up and threw it back." I have never said anything so lovely ! But you mustn't *again* refer back to that Richardson piece of mine, written in my greeny-flowery period. I have modulated to observation and irony in my cricket stuff ; for example : (of Wright's bowling) "Possibly there was some want of variation, but it was good to watch. A certain defect in it was that Hammond at first slip was as free as most of us to watch and admire it with some detachment."

"As he put himself to the ball, receiving many blows and bruises, there was a very distinguished melancholy in his demeanour, as though he were saying, 'We Edriches suffer no pain.'"

I'm afraid the rubber is being lost because the England team doesn't contain enough Edriches.

Blessings on you,  
Ever,

NEVILLE

P.S. I'll drink to you on Christmas Day at 8.30 P.M. (10.30 A.M. English time).

*Dec. 17* Letter from the young man who wanted to know the  
*Tuesday.* whereabouts of Wiltshire :

661 Company  
TAHAG, Egypt  
M.E.L.F.

DEAR MR AGATE,

It is so hard to imagine that anything written here can ever reach London, that I dare make so bold as to remind you of my existence, with the added excuse of sending Greetings for the New Year when it arrives.

Alas ! It seems so long since I set forth from home, a silver shoe-horn in my breast pocket to ward off infidel bullets, and a typewriter in my hand to write back of the Wonders of the World ! And where am I now ? RIGHT in the middle of the desert. You will have seen sand before, of course, but never, I think, as much as this unless you have been here yourself. My diet is desert rat, my relaxation spade and bucket on the unending beach, there are Pharaohs at the bottom of my garden, and the nearest small town is thirty-five miles away down one of Mr Priestley's Highways. (Our position, I believe, is "strategically vital.") I and five other officers sleep in tents, eat and live in a tiny two-room mess, which is just as you might expect it to be : battle-splintered furniture, wheezy gramophone, old *Punches* . . . The sole decoration a huge Pin-up Girl, reclining all over one wall.

My work is to look after three-ton lorries. Now, I know as much about three-ton lorries as I do about Venezuelan bird-life (on second thoughts I know more about Venezuelan bird-life), so I spend the days desperately trying to delegate efficiently the incomprehensible jobs thrust upon me ! As for the Wonders of the World . . . I have seen the Valley of the Nile, and it is very dirty ; Cairo, and it smells. And the Pyramids also : a practical joke played on History.

*Ego* 8, which you gave me in proof before I left, has been a constant pleasure, and is, I think, in many ways, the best of all. It and the *S.T.*, which I have sent weekly, are my constant reminders that there is "a world elsewhere," while the encouragement you gave me has been my main comfort and stay amidst all this nonsense. I hope you are in good health, Sir, and send my Very Best Wishes for the coming year.

Yours sincerely,

PETER FORSTER

*Dec. 20* *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Piccadilly. Godfrey Tearle  
*Friday.* and Edith Evans both miscast. Antony is winding up a lifetime of gormandizing, wine-bibbing, and running after women ; Tearle no more suggests this than Evans can suggest Cleopatra's essential sluttishness. "Think on me, That am with

Phœbus' amorous pinches black." And at once one remembers Millamant's "I nauseate walking." Obviously this Cleopatra nauseated pinching. Why will Evans insist on a part she can't play even in Dryden's tamer version? *All for Love* was produced a year or so before I joined the *Sunday Times*. Here is what St John Ervine had to say about Edith in the *Observer*:

I do not know who had the bright idea of using Restoration costumes for a play about Romans and Egyptians, but I suggest to the Council of the Phoenix Society that if this genius has any more bright ideas he should be persuaded to keep them to himself. The effect of this particular idea was to strip all the sincerity from the play and turn it into a piece of artifice. We could not believe in a Cleopatra so bedizened with petticoats that any period of residence on the banks of the Nile must have been a clammy one. Miss Edith Evans seemed to share our disbelief, for this remarkably able actress misinterpreted the part so completely that she appeared to be miscast. She began by telling her love for Antony as if she were the Princess Victoria telling her governess, the "dear Lehzen," that she *would* be good, and ended up with an excellent imitation of Mrs Gummidge, "the lone, lorn creetur," thinking of the old 'un.

*Dec. 21*            The Lord send me not too good a conceit of myself!  
*Saturday.*        This morning comes a letter from a rubber planter in Malaya saying he has bought *A Shorter Ego* on the advice of a Chinese bookseller.

*Dec. 22*            Lunched with Gwen Chenhalls, after which I slept  
*Sunday.*           through the greater part of a dull B.B.C. concert from Liverpool, at the end of which they had the impertinence to perform Hamilton Harty's setting of Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*. Why couldn't Harty, if he must maunder, get somebody to write words apt for maundering? If this sort of thing is to be condoned Bliss or somebody will be laying hands on Wordsworth's *Intimations*, and Bax or somebody will make an oratorio out of Boswell's *Johnson*. I will have nothing to do with this game of musical paws.

*Dec. 23*            *Between Ourselves.* The new revue at the Playhouse.  
*Monday.*           First- and tenth-rate in equal parts. Brilliant sketches by Eric Maschwitz, including one in which a greengrocer's offspring have gone all Picasso, Bartók, modern poetry, and coterie theatre. Sister confides to brother that she has grown out of



Beethoven. Brother says, "Oh, but you will grow back into him again. Promise me you will grow back!" Bill Fraser's Bloomsbury queer had the audience rocking. Elsewhere several young women piping ditties of little or no tone, and a lot of graceless gawks with bony knees skittering about in ill-fitting tights. One dreadful song beginning "I have heard the mavis *swinging*." Only the sex of the singer prevented her from getting my walking-stick in her chest, javelin-wise.

*Dec. 24 Tuesday.* Worked all day at my *Antony and Cleopatra* notice. In the middle of it an odd little waif walked in with a cake she had baked as a Christmas present for 'me. Why? Because in July I had written her a kind letter about some well-meaning wisps of poems. This promptly set Russell-Smith, who is a sentimentalist, blubbing. Whereupon I cuffed him, and all very merry. In the evening to the pantomime at the Adelphi. Nervo and Knox—in spite of whom I slept almost solidly throughout. No, not drink, since nobody can call one double whiskey drink. Just fatigue. Afterwards to supper with Claire Luce and Peter Page. Claire told us that when she played Cleopatra at Stratford—Jock says she played it oddly well, with a puce navel!—Robert Atkins went up to her as she was waiting in the wings ready to face the audience, and growled, "Remember that the part hasn't been played properly for forty years." And shoved her on. Claire said, "I had the greatest difficulty in preventing myself from beginning :

'If it be love indeed, tell me who played it!'"

Claire is possessed of as pretty a wit as any actress I know.

*Christmas Day.* Lunch at Louis Sterling's. Beecham with an eye more rolling and mischievous than ever. Lady B., Trefor Jones, Bobby Howes, Heather Thatcher, and a lot of people on the fringe of music and drama. I sat almost all of the time in a corner with Godfrey Tearle, and listened to him on the subject of *A. and C.* I had expounded my theory of Antony as a spent amorist and showing it in his face. Tearle said, "I agree. But how am I to look ravaged?" (He leaped at my suggestion that the ideal Antony would have been John Barrymore.) Wonderful charm and no hint of the actor's vanity. Told me how on the preliminary tour his Aberdeen dresser said, "If it's Rob Roy ye're playin' ye'll be needin' a kilt."

*Boring Day.* In my mail this morning :

Date

1. I \*have/have not  
received your last three letters

2. I have not replied owing to my

\*Absence from home  
Change of address  
Indifference  
Forgetfulness  
Laziness  
Rudeness  
Illness  
Imprisonment  
Insanity  
Death

3. I \*Apologise for  
Commiserate with you over  
Laugh at  
Gloat over  
Regard with indifference  
Intend to continue  
Intend to discontinue

the inconvenience caused to  
you by para. 2 above

Signed.....

\* Strike out words not required.

The sender is a Naval captain who has never allowed charm to undermine authority.

*Dec. 28* In *The Times* :  
*Saturday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions*  
*Grape Street, W.C.2*

*To the Editor of " The Times " :*

SIR,

Your obituarist says of W. C. Fields that he was " an almost ideal Mr Micawber in the film of *David Copperfield*." Sir, you will permit me to say that he was not, and demonstrably not, and could not be. Consider Micawber's first appearance in the novel. " ' This,' said the stranger, with a certain condescending roll in his

voice, and a certain indescribable air of doing something genteel, which impressed me very much, 'is Master Copperfield. I hope I see you well, sir?' " There was nothing remotely genteel about Fields's Micawber, who in the film made his first appearance by a highly ungenteel fall through the roof of his own house.

Consider again. " ' Under the impression that your peregrinations in this metropolis have not as yet been extensive, and that you might have some difficulty in penetrating the arcana of the Modern Babylon in the direction of the City Road—in short, that you might lose yourself—I shall be happy to call this evening, and install you in the knowledge of the nearest way.' " Fields's Micawber would not have used the word " peregrination " or known the meaning of " arcana."

Mr Micawber's manners which " peculiarly qualify him for the Banking business " ? Not even Mrs Micawber at her most doting could have said this of Fields. Micawber is a gentleman who keeps his fallen day about him, and if he is not played like this is not played at all. Fields was a glorious buffoon. But being possessed of no more gentility than a pork pie he could do no other with Micawber than turn him into an obese Ally Sloper, with very much the same nose and hat. And that, I submit, is not Dickens's character.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES AGATE

*Dec. 30*      An anonymous letter :  
*Monday.*

# W. C. FIELDS AS MICAWBER

De Mortuis nil nisi bonum

You

Self-advertising

Flamboyant

Swollen-headed

&

Utterly bloody

Bastard.

God wither your right hand !

To James Agate,  
Queen Alexandra Mansions,  
Sour Grape Street,  
W.C.2.

**Dec. 81      My year's work :**  
**Tuesday.**

<i>Sunday Times</i>	57,000 words
<i>Daily Express</i>	42,000    „
<i>Tatler</i>	55,000    „
<i>Ego 8</i>	100,000   „
Odd articles	10,000    „

---

264,000 words

Now let me repeat a little sum which fascinates me. Turning up *Ego 4* (page 152), I find that between September 1921 and December 1939 I had written a total of 5,000,000 words. Again I do the little sum :

December 1939	5,000,000 words
„      1940	350,000    „
„      1941	250,000    „
„      1942	265,000
„      1943	300,000    „
„      1944	316,000    „
„      1945	311,000
„      1946	264,000

7,056,000 words

Whaur's your Balzac and your Bennett noo ? In the scales of quantity, not quality, idiot !

*Jan. 1* I am convinced that this country, as I knew it, is  
*Wednesday.* finished. What next? Am just not interested. It  
 may be that society has no right to buy elegance and  
 comfort at the cost of miners crawling on their bellies three miles to  
 their stations and then standing all day up to their waists in water.  
 It may be that elegance and comfort should go if the result is an  
 additional penny an hour on the collier's pay. *I am just not interested*  
*in the working conditions of coal-mines.* What I am interested in is a  
 first-class performance of *Rosenkavalier* with a bottle of champagne at  
 the Savoy afterwards. To me inequality always has been, and always  
 will be, the spice of life. I think, however, that this country could  
 pull through if the difficulties were purely economic. But they are  
 not. There is a new spirit abroad. I was brought up to believe that  
 the main thing in life was work, and that all pleasured was in the  
 nature of a treat. This spirit is not in the world of to-day; the only  
 connection the modern nose has with the grindstone is to snub it.  
 Modern youth regards life as one unending round of football matches,  
 dog races, crooning, and the pictures, to the last of which it must go  
 four times a week or die. "Après nous le déluge." How right the  
 Pompadour was! After us the deluge. And now it is here. Will it  
 cease? And when the flood subsides what will the new land be like?  
*Je m'en fous!*

•

*Jan. 2* The first thing I demand of a dramatic critic is that he  
*Thursday.* should be able to use words. A man who can use words  
 tells me something about his mind; he who can't use  
 words doesn't. If I know why a man thinks a Hamlet good and a  
 Macbeth bad I can make my own corrections; he gives me the  
 evidence, so to speak. Ken Peacock Tynan (see *Ego* 8) sends me  
 to-day his views upon Wolfitt's production of *Othello* with Valk as the  
 Moor and himself as Iago. I append a few extracts:

I have seen a public event of enormous, constellated magnitude  
 and radiance; I have watched and become part of a transfusion of  
 bubbling hot blood into the invalid frame of our drama. Some, I  
 am told, brag of having seen the Chicago fire; others, more  
 preciously, boast of having escaped the Quetta earthquake by the  
 merest pebble's-breadth; and I have known men swell visibly as

they recalled the tremendous and bloody exploits at Krakatoa. My vaunt is more assuming ; I have lived for three hours on the red brink of a volcano, and the crust of lava crumbles still from my feet. I have witnessed a performance of Shakespeare's *Othello*, in which Frederick Valk played Othello and Donald Wolfit Iago. How hushed I was ! And how chastened ! So much so that for days afterwards, long after I had sent my final, particular roar of " Bravo ! " coursing and resounding about the theatre, I could speak of little but the names of these twin giants and the authentic ring of their titles to greatness. In the mind's middle distance I do think I perceive that other players flickered intermittently across that bare, memorable stage, that flat scene of astounding war ; I can, if I screw up my memory, hear them now, grunting and twittering and shrilling and crying out. Who they were I have not the smallest notion. They it was, as I think, who buzzed and rattled and railed when the big gladiators fell fatigued or retired for momentary refreshment. I should, if there are no strong passions about the matter, prefer to ignore them thus dismissively . . .

Shakespeare, perhaps for fear of too much alarming his audiences, has dealt very unfairly with Othello. Up to the crucial temptation scene (III, 3) he utters only 240 lines of verse, to Iago's 574. And Wolfit took full advantage of this early ascendancy. What a muscular actor he is ! Yet how oddly his ponderous gait contrasts with his rasping whine of a voice ! I need not celebrate again the parts and virtues of his Iago ; its stout craft, its unhurried, terrifying certainty and precision. I would only append a tiny animadversion—upon his treatment of spoken poetry. Wolfit speaking high verse is an experience (for me, at least) analogous to watching a rebellious rogue elephant walking a tight-rope. It is enjoyable only because it is very, very odd. Like a prize-fighter nursing a young flower, like John Steinbeck's Lenny petting a puppy, so is Wolfit when a line of poetry is delivered into his hands. He has doubtless fostered in himself a love of poetry ; but I trace hints of an unwilling courtship that went badly against the grain. This quibble settled, I salute a performance which laid quite bare that " diseased intellectual activity " of which Hazlitt spoke ; a performance worthy the seeing, if only to hear Wolfit giving the hapless word " Nature " its full eight or nine syllables . . .

But this was Valk's private adventure, no other near, and we were soon made to acknowledge it. In appearance he was quintessential teddy-bear ; " not " (I hear Coleridge grumbling) " thorough-bred gentleman enough to play Othello." No aristocracy of gait or bearing ; no regularity of profile ; in short, no leg. Yet, temperamentally (and here, I am persuaded to think, is the secret), there is no other such tragic player on our stage. In all honesty, I cannot believe that there is blood in the man's veins ; it must be some vile compound of corrosive venoms, explosive and nameless ; some crazy river having its dayspring in spleen, and

adulterated with black bile. Why, he was to be touched into mad, lambent flame in a very instant ! He broke every rule of our stage-craft, this berserk Colossus. Following the imperious laws of his agony, his voice would crack and pause, minute-long, in mid-line ; and there would be crazy signalings the while, and rushes as of a wild bull. Then the voice would rise and swoop again into unknown pastures of word-meaning, scooping up huge, vasty syllables of grief as though carving some ancient bed of clay. He seemed, at times, almost to sing, so unlike our custom was his elocution ; a bully's song, a bludgeoner's song, yet its strains moved to pity, as great verse should. I shall see him always, in the latter end of time, singing impious, villainous lullabies to soothe his own congenital disquiet. You could almost hear thin skins splitting and half-shut minds banging and locking themselves about you ; the audience was perturbed, yet pin-still . . . Under Valk, I discovered, verse collapses. I have heard it plausibly objected to him that he loses all the music in words. Now I hold that words are neither harmonious nor discordant ; the verse is [either smooth and end-stopped or it is not. But that kind of minuteness is blankly impertinent when Valk is acting, piercing to the core of elemental, wordless things, willing to tear a heart from sheer granite. There was no time for R.A.D.A. modulations and exquisiteness ; a man was hacking a horrid path for himself, and it was neither pretty nor fanciful ; it was inviolable rage, and there were gulfs awash with tears opening all round him. He stood, as if petrifact, bellowing in their dreadful midst . . . The play, the words, all plays, all words were too small for the immensity of this passion. It transcended the prescribed limits of acted drama, the sublunary business of stage-trafficking, and strode boldly through Hell-lake and bade the white-clad recording imps take notice of foul disorders and malevolent conceits ; of the dilapidation of a sturdy tower ; of the climax of a great anguish ; of the disintegration and molten intoxication of a warrior and demigod.

We who saw these things passing were caught up with Valk to his own impossible pinnacles, and when the curtain fell it was as if an end had been put to the tales of mortal suffering ; after this single, enormous catastrophe there could come no more, no further refinement of woe. The sense of relief preceded the permanent sense of awe ; the full tragic action was communicated like the hot breath of the ferocious antique gods. . . .

Anybody reading this in a hundred years' time should know what these two actors had been like in these two great rôles. And that, and nothing else, in my view is dramatic criticism. In other words, here is a great dramatic critic in the making.

*Jan. 7* Spent the day jotting down notes for article on *The Tuesday. Master Builder.*

- Jan. 8*           Tore up yesterday's notes. Too much like 'prentice-work—allusions to Shaw, Arnold, Montague. Wrote a new article and delivered it at *S.T.* offices.
- Wednesday.*
- Jan. 9*           Retrieved article and destroyed it. Wrote another and, *Thursday.* I hope, final one.
- Jan. 10*          It wasn't final.
- Friday.*
- Jan. 11*          Letter from Neville Cardus :
- Saturday.*

MY DEAR JAMES,

Your letter about my articles has given me a lasting pleasure. To retain your good opinion of my work is an aim always before me, consciously or subconsciously. Of course, I have my ups-and-downs. My song, you see, is compounded like music ; it hath high and low, sharp and flat . . . Sorrow and joy, trouble and peace, sour and sweet, come by vicissitude (especially into an Australian press-box during a Test Match). But this discord in our music, I hope, hurts not, but graceth the song. . . .

It is extremely kind of you, James, to tell me that my articles are "tremendously" appreciated. I only hope George Lyttelton is reading me too. It is a strenuous job ; I have never before watched so closely, and worked so hard. And to-night, after four days of this fluctuating game at Melbourne, I have to broadcast for an hour on the second symphony of Elgar . . . I had nearly written Bradman ! A slip of the pen in such a context which proves how much B. can still get on one's brain. There is no explanation for the England team's troubles as a whole except one : they are just not good, and on the whole not young, enough. Bless you. And now truepenny must soon work i' the earth his way to Adelaide.

Affectionate wishes for 1919 and always,

NEVILLE

- Jan. 15*          Three Arts Ball at the Dorchester. President H.H. *Wednesday.* Marie-Louise. Judged the costumes with Gladys Calthrop, Hermione Gingold, and Harold Holt. Felt like death throughout the evening, but put a smiling face on it.
- Jan. 17*          Godfrey Tearle told me at the Ivy that on Wednesday we *Friday.* awarded one of the first prizes to Philip Guard, the young actor who is so extraordinarily moving as Eros in *Antony and Cleopatra*. I did not recognise him.



*Jan. 18* Spent the day at the Queen Victoria Hospital at East  
*Saturday.* Grinstead. Plastic cases. Nerve-racking but reward-  
 ing. McIndoe is a wonderful fellow. In the evening  
 took Gwen Chenhalls and Tahu Hole to the magician Dante's last  
 performance. As he made pointed reference to me, had to stand up  
 in the box and do some bowing. Felt gratified and an ass in equal  
 proportions.

*Jan. 20* At the invitation of Sydney Box lectured to some Society  
*Monday.* at Beckenham—I never found out what or which. Three  
 hundred people and the best audience I have ever had.  
 Bertie van Thal in the chair. Was told a good story by the Head-  
 master of the County School. Being asked at some Brains Trust to  
 say what, in his opinion, had been the invention most beneficial to  
 mankind, he replied, "The water-closet." Whereupon an elderly pro-  
 fessor on the other side of the Question Master leaned across and said,  
 "And would you, sir, include with that the chain?"

*Jan. 23* An anonymous note sent to me at the Ivy: "Please  
*Thursday.* don't look quite so angry. In Stockholm people rose  
 when Ibsen entered a restaurant. The accompanying  
 brandy is my way of rising."

*Jan. 30* A correction  
*Thursday.*

10 St John's Wood Road  
 London, N.W.8

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

I gather from the *Egos, passim*, that it causes you neither  
 surprise nor embarrassment to be thus addressed by total strangers;  
 but, in case I seem to be taking too much for granted, let me say  
 that Gwen Chenhalls (who has just lent me *Ego 5* to cure the  
 bronchitis) is a very old friend of mine—so I hope we are as good  
 as introduced.

It is about an entry in *Ego 5* that I write. On p. 227 you print  
 a letter from Osbert Sitwell in which he quotes Robert Ross as  
 saying that Marie Lloyd, when a girl of about sixteen with lovely  
 red hair, sat to D. G. Rossetti. Stop me if you've already heard this  
 one in the five years that have since elapsed, but the fact is that  
 D. G. R. died in 1882, when Marie Lloyd was twelve years old.  
 This was two years before he appeared at the Grecian Music Hall  
 under the name of Bella Delmare. It is possible that by 1882 she  
 had already formed her troupe of little girls, "The Fairy Minstrels,"  
 who sang in schoolrooms and mission halls, but it seems a very

remote possibility indeed that these activities could have brought her into contact with Rossetti.

I think the explanation is fairly evident. Ross, having heard this apocryphal story, goes to her and says in an awed voice, "So *you* knew Rossetti. . . . Do you remember him well?" What *could* a warm-hearted creature like Marie Lloyd reply to such an appeal? To have said "No" would have been like snatching the sweet out of a child's mouth: naturally she rose to the occasion at once and replied, "Of *course* I remember him. . . . I've often wondered what happened to the young chap afterwards . . ."; and Ross went away happy. But that reply proclaims itself to all the world as an amiable tarradiddle: for can anyone conceive that a worn-out and prematurely aged man of fifty-four would impress himself on the memory of a girl of twelve as a "young chap"?

I can only hope that your passion for accuracy will deaden any disappointment you may feel at having this pretty legend blown upon. If I thought otherwise I should hesitate to risk such an unhandsome return for all the curious pleasures I have got (and hope long to continue to get) from the *Ego* series.

Yours sincerely,

HAMILTON TEMPLE SMITH.

*Feb. 12*            The worst cold snap for a hundred years joining hands  
*Wednesday.*    with my asthma, and all-fours being an undignified  
                         way of mounting stairs, my disgusting doctor has  
given me the choice between a nursing home and three weeks in bed  
at Grape Street. Have compromised on a fortnight.

*Feb. 14*            Male nurse arrives :  
*Friday.*

M. N. You'll be easy !

J. A. What's that ?

M. N. I've just finished a job in a lunatic asylum. Refractory ward. You'll be the first patient in five years I've been able to turn my back on.

J. A. Don't be too sure !

*Feb. 25*            Had written to George Lyttelton *re* my calling Milton "a  
*Tuesday.*        monumental and boring old buffer." Now comes this  
letter :

*Finndale House*  
*Grundisburgh*  
*Suffolk*

DEAR JAMES,

I was just about to write to you, having heard from B. van Thal that you were ill, and having again missed you in the *S.T.*

I am glad to see from your letter that you really are on the mend.

I hope you are faring better in what B. v. T. aptly called these disgraceful times. I see some kindly Yank says Britain is "an old run-down country." How one would like to call him a liar! But can one, while we are governed by shop-stewards behind a façade of ministers who behave like angry hens? Enough! I know you hate political jaw, though that again is hard to avoid. Let us talk of other things. Milton! The shock was to find one whose taste in big things is, as Keats said of Hazlitt's, a recurrent cause for gratitude in being alive, apparently on the side of the stockbrokers in the matter of Milton. I see your point about "monumental" counter-acting "boring," but I submit that your *Tatler* readers will rejoice to find J. A.'s taste the same as theirs. Philistia will take your half-truth (for of course the old man could be boring) for the whole, and be glad of you.

Exactly at this point the post arrived, with exactly the right parcel to put the Government, the weather, and the pipes in their proper unimportant places. I am, as I told you, childishly pleased to see my name on the title-page of *Ego* 8, and as, temporarily, your chief "stooge," as Ivor Brown on p. 228 calls your chief correspondents in *Ego* 7. Ungrateful man!

How utterly *monstrous* that your party on August 28 with two votes apiece didn't give one of them to Dickens—who could have put Barry Pain and Dornford Yates in his ticket pocket without noticing. *Alice*, of course, is in the right place. But have you ever seen a child reading *Alice*? Intense *interest* but not a smile, it being, of course, his or her world. I am glad to see the *Irish R.M.* got a vote. I should have put in one for Burnand's *Happy Thoughts*. Do you know it? Long out of print!

Later. *Ego* 8 and indeed all the *Egos* are *hopeless* bedside books!—veritable Macbeths! One cannot stop reading, and that pleasant slide into drowsiness never happens. I have far exceeded my ration, and shall have finished dreadfully soon. I shall write again. So far the only lapse from bliss was in reading of your shearing the previous *Ego* by thousands of words. I don't like Agates "very vilely cut." And I will end with this: "For Britain . . . as it is a land fruitful enough of men stout and courageous in war, so it is naturally not over-fertile of men able to govern justly and prudently in peace, trusting only in their mother-wit . . . valiant, indeed, and prosperous to win afield, but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious and unwise; in good or bad success alike, unteachable."

The author? That monumental . . . old josser. He seems very up to date on this occasion.

May you long continue to contribute, though sore set and hindered by stooges and small fry, to the gaiety of nations!

Yours ever,

G. W. L.

Feb. 26      From George Richards :  
 Wednesday.

Some one—I am not sure it wasn't myself—stated in a letter to the Press some time ago that there was no *real* reason why, if only the will were present, the City Fathers of Bournequay should not, by wise investment of their municipal funds and the engagement of a first-rate conductor, use their nucleus of a local orchestra to turn their native seaside city into a Salzburg in England's green and pleasant land. The said Fathers have now got to the point of putting a selected number of candidates for the post of permanent conductor through their paces, and one of these guest-conducted concerts was held at the Pavilion this afternoon. So far so good—ONLY, as this was Great Britain, not little Austria, things in practice work out rather differently. To cope with the weather, to begin with, I put on cape, goggles, sou'wester, and leggings. In one pocket of my overcoat, underneath, I put a flask of brandy, and in the other . . . a good novel.

Other equipment needed and (providentially as it turned out) also taken along included (a) an ear-trumpet (the orchestra numbers less than fifty all told, including the staggering total of twelve violins, with the result that the British municipal concert-goer's first difficulty in that vast arena is to hear anything at all), (b) a set of ear-plugs (to blot out from audition what *should* be those passages of pure serene in the heavenly second movement of Grieg's piano concerto (played by Miss Dorothy Spottikins aged twelve) which absolutely and uncompromisingly require and unconditionally desiderate horn-players capable of using their instrument for more than two bars running otherwise than for the purpose of giving an involuntary representation of a crapulous, crippled, and constipated tortoise wobbling on a mud-bank on the way home from a lost week-end, and likewise to blanket the inevitable murder of that jaunty little passage for the horns in the first movement of the inevitable Dvořák *New World*).

These minor blemishes, however, are only a few ways in which national characteristics affect the musical enterprises of different countries. That, when the concert is over and the audience finds itself back in the dripping Sunday streets, there is not even a cup of tea anywhere to be had goes of course without saying. I am told that later in the year there is to be a Grand Inaugural Concert with which the new conductor will open a Musical Festival To End All Musical Festivals. The opening item on the programme of this concert will be Beethoven's Leonora Overture No. 3, and to mark the occasion fittingly a new musical precedent will be created. The cornet player, when he leaves his stool to play his famous solo, will not retire to the wings to do so, but descend to the auditorium and play it there in the centre gangway *fortissimo*, the rest of the orchestra playing muted throughout.

**Feb. 27**      One of the panic acts of our Socialist Government  
**Thursday.**      during the past fortnight has been to economise electric  
                    current by stopping publication of all the weeklies! I  
had done an article on Ellen Terry for *Picture Post*, and am delighted  
to find this morning that the *Daily Graphic*, acting as host, has offered  
*P.P.* a whole page, and that the article chosen to fill that page is mine.  
Thus I have been able to pay my last respects to Ellen.

**March 1**      This book would not be complete without a portrait of  
**Saturday.**      "Brother Mycroft," who has never failed to live up to  
                    that letter written to me at Giggleswick when he was  
twelve :

Please tell me whether there are any violin-playing boys in the  
school, *and whether the violin master knows anything at all about it.*

Mycroft knows more about engine-driving than any engine-driver,  
and about steeplechasing than any winner of the Grand National,  
this without ever having mounted a footplate or thrown his leg over  
a horse. He is perfectly prepared to give Cotton a lesson in golf, and  
his advice to anybody taking to his bed would be not "Get a doctor,"  
but "See if there is a doctor in your street, and find out whether he  
knows anything about medicine." The annoying thing about it is  
that these pretensions are perfectly founded. Give him a subject  
about which he knows nothing—if there be such a subject—and  
Mycroft will know instinctively the way to set about getting to the  
heart of it. Does so much perfection become a little wearing? As a  
family we have got used to it. I know before I start on any of my  
books that my approach to it, Gustavianly considered, will be wrong,  
and that even along my lines I shall make a mess of it. However, we  
are all very fond of the dear fellow, whose leading characteristic is  
modesty. *He just can't help being right.*

**March 2**      Centenary of the birth of Ellen Terry, and not a single  
**Sunday.**      word about her in any of the papers. It appears that  
                    she is no longer news. But let nobody mention her name  
within earshot of any tomb of mine. My dust would hear it and  
beat, had I lain for a century dead.

**March 8**      In a letter from a lady :  
**Monday.**

I have just come back from Paris—an absorbingly interesting  
fortnight. Among other things, eight plays and two operas. *Don*

*Giovanni* was not good, though Leporello worked hard to pierce the gloom ; I ventured to chuckle once, but my neighbour looked as if I'd committed an act of irreverence.

Two queer things occurred. The first was a violent, personal, and quite irrational dislike taken by me to Marie Bell in Bernstein's *Le Secret*. And why on earth is Pierre Dux wasting that lovely concave dial of his in that particular *galère* ?

The second was—watching a modern French audience watching *Ruy Blas* ! Yonnel was grand, and young Deiber most affecting, but even that had hardly prepared one for the terrific applause that greeted the tirades of *Ruy Blas*. It was absolutely a revelation. The audience was vast and the play far, far more 'living' than any of the modern ones I saw, which were disappointing. It was just that they seemed to have little relation with live people of any age.

*L'École des Femmes* was lovely, and I hope Molière enjoyed seeing himself, over the bar of heaven, in Christian Bérard's settings. Bless the French, anyway, and may they soon be more prosperous and able to find many playwrights, other than M. J.-P. Sartre.

**March 4** Wonderful misprints in Eric Partridge's *Usage and Tuesday. Abusage* :

To die—to sleep  
No more ; and by a sleep we say we end  
The heart-ache. . . .

To sleep no more ? Hamlet hath murdered sleep. And who is " we " to say we end the heartache ?

Who is going to ' take care of ' nonsense when I have stopped diarising ? Here is Geoffrey Grigson in the current *Windmill* : " No man can retain any scrap of the God within him if he stays in the latrine of daily journalism a month beyond reaching thirty." Shades of Montague, Monkhouse, Sidebotham, Mair, Bone, and a score of London journalists who would not have sold one ounce of their souls for all the wealth of Fleet Street !

**March 8** In their delightful history cum treatise cum anthology  
**Saturday.** entitled *The Bed Cecil* and Margery Gray have forgotten, or anyhow left out, the delicious conclusion to Maupassant's *Bel Ami*—my favourite ending after Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Flaubert's *L'Éducation Sentimentale*. Here is the Maupassant—the point being that Georges Duroy, having married Suzanne Walter, daughter of his ex-mistress, descends the steps of the Madeleine

with his bride on his arm and his thoughts bent on another enchantress :

Il descendit avec lenteur les marches du haut perron entre deux haies de spectateurs. Mais il ne les voyait point ; sa pensée maintenant revenait en arrière, et devant ses yeux éblouis par l'éclatant soleil flottait l'image de Mme de Marelle rajustant en face de la glace les petits cheveux frisés de ses tempes, toujours défaits au sortir du lit.

*March 11* "No scandal about Queen Elizabeth, I hope." Sydney *Tuesday*. Carroll's *The Imperial Votaress* is all about Elizabeth's love affair with the Earl of Leicester. Sydney indicates his views about his heroine by showing her at the age of fourteen engaging in fun and games with Sir Thomas Seymour, the Lord High Admiral. This old fribble, half Balzac's Hulot and half Nucingen, being arrested for the aforesaid fun and games, Elizabeth protests against beheading as a punishment for "a harmless bit of slap and tickle." But then Sydney's Elizabeth is nothing if not modern. She tells Leicester that as a lady-killer he is "worse than my old Dad was." And when warned that Drake, Hawkins, and the others are out for loot, she says, "Out for loot I grant, but if they get any I shall have my whack." However, there are some unsuspected good things, though I am not quite sure whether Sydney has suspected them. I like the royal lover who can come to his Queen and say, "Let us be practical, Elizabeth. There are things more important to you at this moment than my miserable wife." And I dote on the executioner who says to a victim, "Why should I flinch at grey hair or shudder for the lovely and the young ? It's my profession. I am paid well and it's dignified. It makes folk like you realise your unimportance. You must excuse me now. I like a chat—but duty calls."

*March 12* *Ego 8 published.*  
*Wednesday.*

*March 19* Brighton disagreeing with me—I have not closed an eye  
*Wednesday.* for three nights—I returned to Grape Street to-day, where I intend to stay put till some kind of strength returns to me. Not too pleased to discover that the drug my d.d. is giving me is paraldehyde, the stuff they gave the dipsomaniac in *The Lost Week-end*. Delirium tremens, emphatically no. Delirium minimens, possibly !

**March 20** My nurse has left. He was extremely kind and efficient,  
**Thursday.** and gave me all the comfort that comes from reliability.

Name of John Southern. He leaves because on arriving home yesterday he found a letter offering him and his wife the joint secretaryship of a nursing institute. With the offer goes a large flat; this has a playroom for the two-and-a-half-year-old kiddie they have adopted. Selfish I may be, but not a monster. So I pack him off at once. Which isn't very brave of me, as I know that in this sort of emergency my luck always holds. I fully expect that in about ten minutes it will be raining male Sarah Gamps and Betsey Prigs.

**March 21** This morning two ex-Sick Bay Attendants presented  
**Friday.** themselves, and can I use them? They appear to know all about high explosives and what to do with a man who has been six hours in the water, so I shall let them take on my job in turns. There was a third alternative, also a sailor, who fell from a mast forty feet high some months ago and is still suffering from concussion. I advised him to go on the pictures, on the principle that every film actor is as concussed as he.

**March 22** In a letter :  
**Saturday.**

These are the books I have carried in my kitbag throughout the war : Hesketh Pearson's *Bernard Shaw* ; Boswell's *Johnson* ; Shakespeare ; Kingsmill and Pearson's *This Blessed Plot* ; T. E. Lawrence's *Letters* ; Shaw's *Pen Portraits and Reviews* ; Agate's *Brief Chronicles*. These seven books were more to me than the sailor's seven necessities : lifebelt, electric iron, " private " bucket (for dobeying), tiddley suit, Post Office Savings Bank book, pillow, Burberry. And, if Shakespeare was my lifebelt, *Brief Chronicles* was the little red light on it one switched on, when struggling in the water, to attract the attention of passing ships. I have carried this book with me to Liverpool, Belfast, Glasgow, Devonport, Gibraltar, Malta, Alex, Bombay, Trincomali, Colombo, Fremantle, Sydney, and, finally, to a Japanese surrender at Rabaul. . . .

**March 24** Second printing of *Ego* 8 put in hand.  
**Monday.**

**March 25** Allowed out and about. Not very far out and not very  
**Tuesday.** much about. A sort of bath-chair existence on foot. But it's better than nothing. What a good and understanding doctor Norman Newman is ! A tower of strength to his patients,



because he persuades them that they are towers in their own right. Gwen Chenhalls called for me in the car and gave me one of her kill-or-cure luncheons. Bill of fare: anchovies, lobster salad, treacle tart, coffee laced with brandy. Bringing two glass ornaments out of her dining-room, she planked them on the kitchen table—we were lunching in the kitchen—and said “Claridge’s!” And Claridge’s it seemed. After lunch more coffee, more brandy, a rug over my knees, and an hour’s snooze. After which she drove me back to Grape Street. Gwen is my ideal of a ministering angel—not too sympathetic, and therefore bracing. I have been astonished at the amount of kindness showered on me since I have been ill. My papers have vied with each other in consideration and generosity. George Harrap has been a fountain of champagne; Larry Sullivan, when he called, bulged in every pocket; grapes galore and dozens of anonymous eggs. Gwen has called every day with a lunch she has prepared with her own hands. My good friends Alfred and Dolly Burger have sent me a hot meal every night from their little club. And, of course, all my particular cronies rallied round me. Most touching of all was a bunch of flowers sent by that dear actress Elliot Mason, who has been ill in a flat above mine since before Christmas and whom I am not yet allowed to visit.

*March 26* In a letter from my, and Leo’s, little Dublin friend,  
*Wednesday.* J. E. Jordan, now official play-reader to the Gate Theatre:

I sometimes wish I’d never read a line of you, that I’d never, out of curiosity, taken down from the library shelves the bulky first two volumes of *Ego*; then I should never have acquired, perhaps, a taste for the past, its people and its art, far exceeding in intensity my taste for the present and the future. I should then have developed in the normal fashion of the modern youth, and cultivated a passion for poetry about lavatories and copulation, and novels about lavatories and copulation and (dare I say it?) music about lavatories and copulation. I should then have acquired a healthy contempt for doddering dramatic critics dribbling about an old barn-stormer called Irving and a French cow called Bernhardt. I suppose it’s possible to retire into one’s own intellectual and spiritual planet and gaze only occasionally and with complacency on the worlds of one’s fellows. But it comes with age, I imagine. At fifty it may be that I shall be able to write in perfect sincerity, like Edward Agate: “What do I care for anything that can happen to me at Thompson’s Cross so long as I have the surge and surf of the great Pandemonium in my ears?” But not at seventeen.

**March 27** From Elizabeth Bowen's review of *Ego* 8 in the *Tatler* :  
**Thursday.**

I think Mr Agate should stand out as the prominent man who has talked least nonsense about the atomic bomb.

**March 28** I can live without food, but not without wit, a commodity  
**Friday.** that doesn't easily find its way into a sick-room. I was delighted, therefore, when I undid a parcel this morning and found that Tommy Earp had sent me three volumes of Henry Becque. I open *Querelles Littéraires* and read how a M. Abraham Dreyfus had written to a number of authors—Augier, Dumas, Sardou, Gondinet, Legouvé, Doucet, Dennery, Pailleron, Zola—asking them how they set about writing a play. He was inundated with replies, the best of which, says Becque, came from Halévy, who didn't answer at all! And then this follows :

Quant à l'auteur du *Voyage de M. Perrichon*, il faut lui rendre cette justice, l'esthétique n'a jamais été son fort et il y est visiblement embarrassé ; mais il a esquivé la difficulté avec un mot d'une drôlerie irrésistible. " Pour faire une pièce," a dit M. Labiche, " je cherche d'abord un collaborateur."

**March 29** Even the pin-pricked get tired of it. In a letter from  
**Saturday.** Park Lane :

On p. 64 of *Ego* 8 you write : " My obsession about misprints continues." But on the book's very first page you will find the word " kingdoms " misspelt.

Have duly returned thanks. " Indeed, unusual thanks, since I now realise that some Park Lane millionaires can spell."

**March 30** Ivor Brown's review of *Ego* 8 suggests that he has at last  
**Sunday.** cottoned on to the fact that *Ego* is my diary, and not Adam Smith's or Mr Attlee's. I am very pleased with :

Mr Agate has certain fields and the sight of a fence does not tempt him to jump out of them. Politics, economics, ethics, religion, or its secular substitute—all the great foundations of living he mainly chooses to pass by, at least in these chronicles. To the trimmings, bedizenments, and decorations of life he brings a reading, an experience, a memory and a gusto without parallel in our time.

**March 31** I am always mindful of that passage in Max's *Around Monday*. *Theatres* about "that period when a man begins to bore young people by raving to them about the mimes whom they never saw." (My copy has a note in Jock's handwriting: "Must tell J. A. this.") I have made it a rule never to talk about Irving unless some playgoing chit tells me that some nincompoop at Gunnersbury playing the lead in *The Donkey Has Two Tails* is a great actor. Then I let fly. This train of thought has been suggested to me by the fact that in my mail this morning an unknown friend sends me Henry Arthur Jones's *The Shadow of Henry Irving*. This has the wonderful last sentence "To the remotest corners of time and humanity we will not part from him." For forty years I have felt about H. I. what Iago pretended to feel about Othello: "I am your own for ever." It has not been within the power of Time to weaken this.

**April 1** There is, I hope and pray, nothing of Chadband in my **Tuesday**. make-up. As an a-moralist I have all my life studiously avoided claptrap about behaviour. Wherefore, being invited by the B.B.C. to give a talk on "How to Live," I have gone to work circumspectly, I might almost say gingerly. Here is a bit of the MS., which I have arranged to record, as I am not quite up to the excitement of doing it 'live.'

The first condition of learning how to live is to avoid doing that which will stop you from living at all. For example, there is no point in finding out how to conduct your life if you are busy drinking yourself to death. Even so, I have respected some men who have drunk themselves into their graves more than others who, as Pinero's Dick Phenyl said, have trembled at gravity and lived to the age of ninety. On the 15th of May, 1933, I attended a ceremony to see Sir Frank Benson and Dame Madge Kendal do honour to the memory of a man who on that date one hundred years before had died of drink. Now there must, you will agree, be something extraordinary about a drunken vagabond to whom two noble spirits of our own time went to do honour. Well, there was. The place was the foyer of Drury Lane Theatre: the honour was the placing of a wreath at the base of a statue; the statue was that of Edmund Kean, England's greatest tragedian. I do not say to anybody listening to me, "Don't abuse Nature so much that at the age of forty-six Nature has had enough of you." That is outside the scope of this talk, and would be an impertinence. What I do say is that if you must abuse Nature, abuse her to some purpose. If you must die of drink, then leave behind something that men are going to talk about. If you must end your life selling matches on

the kerb-stone, see to it that you have done something that has enriched the world. And if you have no talent, then I implore you not to indulge in those follies and exuberances which are the prerogative of genius. This is my advice to the ordinary man. Live your life so that when you pass on people will say, "He was a decent sort."

This is a reconstruction of something I said to 1000 Boy Scouts in a field at Uxbridge three days after the Kean centenary. I remember that there was a disapproving bishop in the chair. Or let me say a faintly approving one.

*April 2* Letter from Gerard Bell, a brilliant, modest young man,  
*Wednesday.* reminding me of a benevolent eaglet, engaged in the editorial department of Harrap's :

46 Museum Street  
W.C.1

DEAR MR AGATE,

When you invited me last week-end to be your guest for lunch on Monday I was very much afraid, I must confess, of boring you to distraction with my feeble prattle during our first ten minutes together. But you gave no sign of being bored ; and it is for this exercise in self-control that I am writing to thank you now, as well as for the excellence of your hospitality. Mr Mathew is a charming man ; it was nice of you to let me meet him. The way you described him—as looking rather like " a bemused St Bernard "—delighted me very much. At any rate, the " St Bernard " part of it hits him off exactly ; he struck me as particularly wide-awake.

During the past twelve months I haven't seen you in better health or spirits than just before your illness ; and I was shocked to find such a great change in you when you came back from Brighton. But you have recovered now so well that my greatest pleasure yesterday was not in sitting at table with you, but in knowing that you were back to form.

You always consider your friends in everything else ; please now consider them in the thing that matters to them most : please don't overwork again. You will only distress us. If you knew how much you upset us all, from the heads of the firm down to me, a month or two ago I do not think you would take risks with your health as you have been doing for so long.

You will not be annoyed with me for writing to you in this strain, because I am sincerely, dear Mr Agate, and, may I say, most affectionately, yours,

G. F. BELL

*April 4* Any port in a storm, and any joke in a period of depression. In my mail a day or two ago a Belgian refugee from the First World War asked me if I would kindly forward a letter. On the envelope was written :

Winston Churchill  
c/o James Agate, Esq.  
*Daily Express*

I duly forwarded the letter, and had a charming acknowledgment in Winston's handwriting.

*April 12* Some people after an illness resume their job with a whimper ; I prefer the bang. Here is my *rentrée* for *Saturday.* to-morrow. If the essential Rachel is not here, compressed into a miserable seven hundred words, let my brains be taken out, buttered, and given to a dog :

### THE GREATEST ACTRESS

Miss March Cost's novel, *Rachel*, is like a palatial mansion, exquisitely decorated and handsomely appointed. Not a period piece is missing. Alas, the rightful owner is from home ! Somebody who might be a French Helen Faucit or Fanny Kemble, a nice-minded daughter of the arts who has absent-mindedly come by two children and a rabble of lovers without acquiring a husband, is the *châtelaine*.

Take that extraordinary *liaison* with Véron, pill-maker and theatrical patron, stout, bald, baby-faced baboon, with a thin ring of yellow beard and a scrofulous neck hidden in so many neck-cloths that wits addressed their letters to him : " Monsieur Véron, dans sa cravate, à Paris." This was the scurvy rascal to whom Rachel, knowing well what she did, gave herself at the age of sixteen. Miss Cost, making her heroine say, " This experience was to remain the most revolting of my life," seeks to excuse the peccadillo on the score that the great public, prompted by Jules Janin, had not yet discovered the new genius, and that she sacrificed her virtue to her art. But what nonsense to attempt condonation of the subsequent life of luxury and riot on the ground that " every capitulation on my part inevitably rendered the first less important." And how explain away the fact that Rachel was Véron's mistress for three years after all Paris had declared itself prostrate at her feet ? How explain that she broke off relations with this acclaimed grotesque because of the public scandal, and later on resumed those relations privately ? The explanation is that both Rachel and

Véron were of the gutter, fellow-adventurers revelling in the *nostalgie de la boue*.

A few days before her death Rachel wrote, "If the scandal-mongers busy themselves with my life, let them tell the truth in all its simplicity." Well, what is the truth? The truth is that Rachel was the greatest actress the world has ever seen, the panther to Kean's lion. That she was in her private life a close-fisted, avaricious, rapacious cheat. That she had a mania for cadging, and never left a house without begging some gewgaw. That she would put her name down for a charity concert knowing she would not appear, and then demand twenty tickets, sell them to her lover of the moment, beg them back and sell them again to the lover next in favour. That she and her father blackmailed the Comédie Française into subsidising the entire Félix brood. That she would feign illness, obtain leave of absence, and undertake a whirlwind, money-making tour. That she richly earned the quip of Judith Bernat: "Je suis juive, moi, mais Rachel est un juif."

She acted by intuition. She could not spell. She did not read the plays in which she appeared, and in *Les Horaces* never knew who said "Qu'il mourût!" or why. Age-long paradox! Rachel alone of all actresses had the voice and stomach for

On ne voit point deux fois le rivage des morts.

The world has agreed with our own G. H. Lewes, who said, "Whoever saw Rachel play Phèdre may be pardoned if he doubt whether he will ever see such acting again."

Rachel died at the age of thirty-seven fingering a bedspread covered with gold pieces. The mourners at the graveside included Déjazet, Jane Essler, Scribe, the older and the younger Dumas, Sandeau, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Vigny, Mérimée, Augier, Halévy, Gautier, Murger, and Michel and Calmann Lévy, Balzac's publishers. Alone the Comédie was not represented. Why? Because, years before, Samson, thinking that the *père* Félix was coming it a bit too strong, had kicked the old man downstairs. Papa Félix, remembering this, objected to Samson's presence at the graveside. To compensate, Matthew Arnold wrote some inspired nonsense.

Less than six months ago I stood by the bed on which Rachel died. The room, whose furniture had not been touched, still breathed the spirit of the virago, drab, harpy, *grande amoureuse*, great artist, tormented, unhappy soul. Of Miss Cost's equable heroine not a trace.

April 18    Much touched by this telegram :  
Sunday.

SO HAPPY TO FIND YOU BACK ON SUNDAY TIMES WARMEST  
WISHES—DOLLY AND MARK HAMBOURG.

*April 14 Monday.* Criticism is not what it was either in this country or in France. Esmé Percy called to-day and gave me a copy of Léonard de Géréon's *La Rampe et les Coulisses*, being a volume of thumbnail sketches of the directors, actors, and actresses of the principal theatres in Paris in 1882. The first sketch, if you please, is one of my and Rachel's adored Véron. "Industriel, artiste, amateur-homme-de-lettres, la nature, en créant M. Véron, semble avoir voulu essayer tout ce qu'elle pouvait faire pour un directeur d'Opéra."

The book fills me with a curious sort of envy. What would I not give to be able to write of a well-known actor what was written here of Monval: "Les succès obtenus par ses camarades lui font mal; il étouffe d'envie, il mourra d'amour-propre."

I know at least a dozen actresses about whom it would be a joy to write as the author wrote about Mlle Théodrine:

M. Poirson peut dire comme Napoléon: *c'est une de mes erreurs!* mauvaise à l'Ambigu et plus mauvaise encore au Gymnase, made-moiselle Théodrine n'a pas même l'avantage d'une figure agréable. Laide, mais laide à plaisir, elle est sans aucune espèce de grâce, ne se doute pas des premiers éléments de l'art dramatique. On dit qu'elle cherche un mari, probablement parce qu'elle ne peut pas trouver un amant.

*April 15 Tuesday.* There is a story about a nobleman who was buying his ticket for Paris when his valet touched him on the sleeve and said, "M'lord, the man behind me in the queue has just fallen down dead." "Nonsense," said his lordship. "Fetch a policeman." The notion that you can cure abnormality by sending for the police or dispatching its victims to work in the coal-mines is on the same level of imbecility. Douglas Home's *Now Barabbas* swims in homosexuality, treated in comic and sentimental but never in realistic vein. I hold that this highly specialised subject is not one to which the stage should be much beholden, but that if there is to be treatment at all that treatment should be adu'. Why doesn't the prison governor send for the chaplain or the medical officer or both and ask to be told what Housman meant by that poem about the young man doomed to oakum and the treadmill because of "the nameless and abominable colour of his hair"? Will the Law never realise what psychologists have been shouting in its ear for forty years—that the born homosexual is one of Nature's carefully arranged vagaries, that for one of this type contact with the opposite sex is as

repugnant as homosexuality is to the normal man ? Let the Law take the strictest measures against proselytism, acts of public indecency, the violation of, or any lesser offence towards, young boys—let it come down with the greatest severity upon peccant schoolmasters, scout-masters, choirmasters doing harm to children placed in their care. But let the Law realise that at twenty-one a young man should know what sex he belongs to, and that it is nonsense to send a Walt Whitman to gaol for two years because he likes holding hands with a beard-enamoured bus-conductor. What the governor in this play does is to shelve his problem by sending the young man to another gaol, in the hope that the change of air will turn his tresses into a crop of manly stubble like the Manassa Mauler's. I do not believe in placating the Censor by throwing a sop to Colonel Blimp.

This play has a further fault. It is nearly an hour too long for its intellectual content. If ever a playwright missed his chance for a fine ending it was this author in this piece. The murderer has been told that a reprieve will not be granted. It is next morning, and the prisoners have been ordered to their cells. The warder is exhibiting traces of something which may be nerves or even compassion. It is nearing eight o'clock, and the doomed man has heard the steeple "sprinkle the quarters on the morning town." And into the minds of some in the audience to-night must have come recollection of Housman's great lines :

Strapped, noosed, nighing his hour,  
He stood and counted them and cursed his luck ;  
And then the clock collected in the tower  
Its strength, and struck.

The gaoler removes his cap. Was ever opportunity so missed ?

*April 18* Sentimental objection being taken to my view of Rachel,  
*Friday.* I have sent this further letter to the *Sunday Times* :

Rachel not of the gutter ? Legouv  said that at her most tragic she had " un fond de titi gouaill ur," meaning that she could never quite get away from being a nose-thumbing street-arab. Contemporary opinion ? Hear Mlle George talking to Victor Hugo : " Being horribly hard up, I took my courage in both hands and went to see Rachel to ask her to play in *Rodogune* with me at my benefit. She would not see me, and sent word that I was to write to her. No, thank you ! Low though I may have sunk, I have not sunk as low as that ! I have been as great an actress as Rachel and as big a slut . . . "



Jules Janin wrote : " Sometimes superb, sometimes mediocre, to-day she will ride the clouds, to-morrow she will be in the abyss. There is no praise and no censure that she has not deserved. Statue . . . spectre . . . a projection of the human will . . . a shadow." My theory of acting sees no reason why the paramour of a vulgar *coureur de filles* like Véron should not have constituted herself the full orchestra of human passion, just as it sees no reason why some blameless incarnation of all the female virtues should do justice to a hurdy-gurdy. I am not astonished when I read Rachel's letter to her flighty sister Sarah : " Je suis décidée à rentrer grosse en France, dont le chagrin doit être exclu." This and twenty-four similar letters, all addressed to Sarah, the *soupeuse vaillante*, were part of the collection of M. Félix Drouin, to whom Sarah originally sold them. What was Sarah's income at the time of the re-sale ? Six thousand francs. Left her by whom ? By Rachel. How much did the letters fetch at the re-sale ? Two hundred and twenty-seven francs. Two hundred and twenty-seven francs to save the reputation of a dead sister and a great artist ! But Rachel, *de son vivant*, would not have parted with the odd twenty-seven, and Sarah was not Rachel's sister for nothing.

In all that is known to me as Rachel's biographer I find nothing that I should not expect in the daughter of an Alsatian pedlar and a Bohemian dealer in second-hand clothes. Except, of course, the genius. Matthew Arnold, writing a lot of nonsense at her death, had the sense to wind up with the superbly understanding " Her genius and her glory are her own." I am not incommoded when a woman whose genius and glory have become legend turns out to have had avarice, meanness, and cupidity written on her brow, and to have spent her life getting to know the torments of hell. What, pray, has genius ever had to do with non-hell ?

*April 23*      On a Saturday in December 1899 Benson in *Richard II*  
*Wednesday.*      gave the finest Shakespearean performance I have ever seen, and on the following Monday morning Montague came out with his famous two-column notice about Richard as artist getting exquisite pleasure out of muffing the royal job and paying the medieval penalty for royal failure. Was C. E. M. upset because Benson omitted " Yet I'll hammer it out " - " it " being the comparison between Richard's prison and the world—five words which set the seal on the actor's interpretation and gave C. E. M. his cue ? No. He was content to call the omission " a strange mischance."

Being twenty-two at the time, I thought that any young man had the right to ask any actor why he had missed this point or that. Forcing my way into Benson's dressing-room at the next performance,

I demanded to know why he had omitted those five vital words. Benson said he *didn't think they mattered*. Further, that the notion of Richard as artist was quite new to him. I then pulled Montague's notice out of my pocket and read :

Mr Benson made amends with a beautiful little piece of insight at the close, where, after the lines

Mount, mount, my soul ! Thy seat is up on high,  
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die,

uttered much as any other man might utter them under the first shock of the imminence of death, he half rises from the ground with a brightened face and repeats the two last words with a sudden return of animation and interest, the eager spirit leaping up, with a last flicker before it goes quite out, to seize on this new ' idea of ' the death of the body. Greater love of art could no man have than this, and, if we understood him rightly, it was a brilliant thought of Mr Benson's to end on such a note.

Benson listened courteously to the provincial hobbledehoy and said, " That is a brilliant thought on the part of your friend. But I confess the idea has never entered my head. To me it has just seemed that to rise on my elbow would be theatrically effective."

A paradox ? If you like. Sixty years of intensive playgoing have taught me that the great actor knows *what* he must do, but never *why*, and that when an actor knows why he must do a thing the doing of it by him just isn't worth watching.

Now comes Alec Guinness, who does well in the matter of verbal *panache*. His performance is finely calculated, yet, to me, remains inescapably only semi-Richard. This is because of this actor's Herbert Pocket, that miraculous glove-fit of player and part. But then if Edward Terry had ever essayed, say, Enobarbus, my ear must have caught the echo of Dick Phenyl's " Last time, Clemmy, my boy ! " These things cannot be helped. What schoolboy, then, does this Richard suggest to me ? Steerforth. But a schizophrenic Steerforth, half peeved at being no longer head of the school, half smacking his lips with Henry James's Mrs Highmore at the discovery that " a failure in the market is something that a success somehow isn't." The result to-night was, for me, not an overwhelming Richard, but a sincere one trying to get away from Pocket, Steerforth, and, yes, Mr Toots, and never quite succeeding. " Will majesty give Richard leave to live till Richard die ? It's of no consequence, thank you." Guinness's genius is for the rueful comic, a note which this play never

strikes. He received a tremendous ovation. But then so did everybody else. And, as all the other characters are insufferable dullards, I can only conclude that much of the applause was a tribute to the skill with which the company threaded its way in and out of a décor consisting entirely of the unremoved supports and stanchions of the old, reinforced, war-time shelter.

*April 24*      Letter to Tom Curtiss :  
*Thursday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR TOM,

I have received a wonderful package from you containing butter, ham, pheasant, rice, and candy. I am sending this to Gwen Chenhalls for her to cook for me, with some idea of getting a teaspoonful or so of it down. I have completely lost my appetite and am getting steadily weaker. Stairs now give me as much trouble down as up, and ten yards is an adventure. It may well be, then, that this is the last letter you will receive from me. Which is why it should be a jolly one. Every moment of our friendship has been a delight ; I remember most of them, and I don't think we could have quarrelled if we had tried. If necessary, give two messages for me. The first, of course, is to the adorable Gishes ; they will know what is in my mind. The second is to Nathan, to whom you are to say that George and James put together would have made a damned fine dramatic critic.

On the other hand, my dear boy, I may go on being a public nuisance for another ten years, though, judging by the way I am feeling at the moment, if this isn't dying I am inclined to say what Barrie's Cinderella said about her policeman's effusion : " In my poor opinion if it's not a love-letter, it's a very near thing."

Let's hope this isn't good-bye.

Ever,

JIMMIE

P.S. I am just going out to stand George Harrap lunch and a bottle of champagne. At 5.30 I'm engaged to drink champagne with C. B. Cochran before the dress-rehearsal of *Bless the Bride*. And, damn it, if I can't find somebody to buy me champagne for supper I shall buy some for myself. With mirth and laughter let death-rattles come !

*May 1*  
*Thursday.*

FICTION, 1837

"How old is that horse, my friend?" inquired Mr Pickwick, rubbing his nose with the shilling he had reserved for the fare.

"Forty-two," replied the driver, eyeing him askant.

"What!" ejaculated Mr Pickwick, laying his hand upon his note-book. The driver reiterated his former statement. Mr Pickwick looked very hard at the man's face, but his features were immovable, so he noted down the fact forthwith.

"And how long do you keep him out at a time?" inquired Mr Pickwick, searching for further information.

"Two or three weeks," replied the man.

"Weeks!" said Mr Pickwick in astonishment—and out came the note-book again.

"He lives at Pentonwil when he's at home," observed the driver, coolly, "but we seldom takes him home, on account of his weakness."

"On account of his weakness!" reiterated the perplexed Mr Pickwick.

"He always falls down when he's took out o' the cab," continued the driver, "but when he's in it, we bears him up werry tight, and takes him in werry short, so as he can't werry well fall down; and we've got a pair o' precious large wheels on, so ven he *does* move, they run after him, and he must go on—he can't help it."

*Pickwick Papers*

FACT, 1837

MARE 'PROPPED UP'

*Owner Fined £25*

When John Newman, of South Farm-road, Worthing, was fined £25 at Brighton to-day for causing a mare to be worked while in an unfit state, it was stated that four men had to support the mare to prevent it from falling after it was removed from the shafts. Mr S. Balfour-Jones, veterinary surgeon, said that the mare was in such a deplorable condition that he ordered it to be shot on the spot.

*The "Evening News"*

*May 2* For the delectation of readers who insist that a diary shall  
*Friday.* be personal. As the result of a paroxysm of coughing I am now encumbered with more harness than Achilles's horse when it dragged the body of Hector round the walls of Troy. Spent to-night whimpering with pain in a box at Ivor Novello's new comedy, *We Proudly Present*. Supper consisted of a bowl of warm water with some bits of dejected macaroni floating in it—why do they cut it so short?—and a square inch or so of escalope of pork or perhaps venison, looking and tasting exactly like linoleum. Home early and jotted down the following, still in pain :

“And are etceteras nothing?” Let Ancient Pistol be told that they may constitute the entire evening. Mr Novello will not insist too strongly on the credibility of his plot, which is that you can make a rip-roaring success of some highbrow nonsense with a title like *The Mock Turtle has Two Shells* by playing it as farce.

The author, I think, was out less to write a play than to give a witty, malicious peep behind repertory scenes. His principal character is an easily recognisable type. Sandra Mars is your repertory leading lady *par excellence*, the kind which can play every West End actress off the stage and is never going to get on that stage herself. The sort which brings to mind something written about Bernhardt by the great Rumanian actor de Max :

“Acteur, je connus l'actrice Sarah. Je connus aussi à son Théâtre une petite fille, qui s'appelait, par hasard, Sarah. Ai-je détesté, ai-je aimé cette insupportable petite fille? Je ne sais plus. C'est si loin. J'ai vieilli. Pas elle. C'est toujours une petite fille, une insupportable petite fille, qui a des caprices, des cris, des crises. Ah! les crises de cette petite fille!”

To translate this would be to spoil its cadences. Wherefore I refrain, but offer as glossary: *Acteur*, actor; *Actrice*, actress; *Théâtre*, theatre; *Caprices*, caprices; *Crises*, crises.

Miss Ena Burrill gives a wonderful performance. Opposite her is Phyl Perriman, the old trouper who can play anything from Gertrude to Mrs Bouncer. Lovely playing by Miss Phyllis Monkman. Then there is Franz Mahler, the Viennese opera-singer, whose gusto and jargon throughout the War made life at Swiss Cottage a joy. “But, Madame,” says the highbrow producer, “there's no part for you in my play. The *Turtle* is not a musical.” Replies the Viennese star, “But in the second act there should be a drawing-room mit piano. Vell, at dat piano I sink five sonks. It is quite simple!” I stopped counting the number of times that Miss Irene Handl snatched the play from Miss Monkman, Miss Monkman from Miss Burrill, and Miss Burrill from Miss Handl.

The men are not so well served. The producer who is prepared to gamble his all on a play that shall be unusual, vital and significant—“Rather a lot for one playwright, don't you think?” says Miss Monkman acidly—should be a short, bespectacled, spotty, Bloomsbury ass. The solemn idiocies of the type entirely escaping

elegant Mr Peter Graves, I found myself hoping that the second act would contain a drawing-room mit piano, silk hat, walking-stick, and a nineteen-tennish ditty about Full Moon in Half Moon Street. It didn't, alas. But it's never too late to mend.

For a man in pain I don't think this too bad. In other words, I feel that some of the plugs still spark, though the ironmongery as a whole is falling to pieces.

*May 10* Letter to a highbrow in Rugeley, Staffordshire, who  
*Saturday.* asks what are the chances for a dramatic poem whose characters are called Yesterday, To-day, To-morrow, Infinity, and Mother Time :

Who do you think is going to pay money to listen to a pow-wow between Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday ?

*May 12* An exchange of letters. From Neville Cardus :  
*Monday.*

*Sydney*  
*Australia*

MY DEAR JAMES,

Blessings for the latest *Ego*. I agree with Ivor Brown (p. 228). When *you* are writing the book is as good as ever. I miss Pavia. He was not happy with *Saccharissa*—if, indeed, it was by essential Leo. But Alan Dent is back to form. The trouble with both of you, though, is that you *will* be 'funny' and play upon words. You, with your "Cheops and Tomato Sauce," and Alan with his "rose-red city half as old as Denham." You can see them coming ; one bows before them. I'm sure that when I return to London (in June) you'll both make me feel tongue-tied and simple—and very wise. But I am not attempting root-and-branch belittlement. I merely note mannerisms.

I have come to the conclusion that you are the best critic of acting since Lewes. Whether you are as good about a play I daren't say, because usually you agree with my own feeling about plays ; and I'm not an expert. I'd rather see a Forbes-Robertson in, say, *Mice and Men* than never mind who in something by Pirandello. When you write about the theatre I see it all—from Crummles to Jean Yonnel—Naphtha to 'modern' lighting ! Montague hadn't the sense of the vital vulgarity of the stage. And Ivor Brown is able to write of the theatre as felicitously as about Ricardo on Rent. Best of all, you are, on all matters, stimulating, alive, honest—and a writer born.

My *Autobiography* has been chosen by the Book Society as the "Book of the Month" for September. I hadn't the nerve to ask you again to correct proofs for me. Besides, I wanted you to come

to the book fresh. In my most depressingly self-critical moods I think it is first-rate. When I have taken two glasses of Australian Burgundy I think it is a masterpiece.

Lay in some chicken and champagne against my descent on you in June. And give my love to Gwen Chenhalls.

With deepening affection,

NEVILLE

Have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR NEVILLE,

Thanks for letter. Harold Hobson picked out *Saccharissa* as the best thing in the book. Of course, it can only succeed with people who know, as Leo and I knew, the full idiocy of nineteen-year-old highbrows. But if it fails it fails. It is the perfect thing in collaboration. Neither of us could remember who wrote what, with the exception of the phrase "Looking round, Raoul was surprised to find Messalina Oldcock in tears." That was pure Leo. About "Cheops" and "rose-red Denham," I don't believe anybody in Australia would see these things after they had come, let alone when they were on the way.

It is quite possible that I am not a good judge of plays. For example, I regard the whole of the later Sean O'Casey as pretentious twaddle. On the other hand, I not only think, I *know*, that I am the best critic of acting during the last hundred years.

I am sick of the reviewers who complain of the absence in *Ego* of the 'real' me. Well, the foregoing is as much essential me as Shylock's pound of flesh would have been the essential Antonio. And I wish them joy of it!

I am enormously looking forward to your return in June, and promise you not only chicken and champagne, but a visit to Lord's, when I will expound to you the finer points of the game. That is, if they allow bath-chairs at the ringside. I am in the middle of a long and serious illness, peevishly borne. The other day I said to Gwen Chenhalls, "Have you noticed on my face any of that strange spiritual beauty which novelists tell us is the result of prolonged physical suffering?" Gwen said, "No, dear."

Ever,

JIMMIE

*May 18* My oldest and best friend, Fred Dehn, died to-day. Have  
*Sunday.* sent this to the *Manchester Guardian* :

Round about the turn of the century I met a young German who possessed a quality not shared by the hundreds of other young Germans invading the great shipping houses in Manchester. This was the quality of being light in hand, engaging in personality, and witty in talk, an enormous change from the serious young men

of Hamburg who came over to Manchester to worm themselves into the city's trade on a pittance on which only a German worm could live. But Frederick Edward Dehn—Fritz to his friends—was Manchester-born, being the son of the extremely cultivated and highly musical Gustav Dehn, to whom and to whose kind the Hallé Concerts owed their existence and then their pre-eminence. Dehn's mother was a woman of wide culture whose uncle had been Bismarck's doctor. The young man grew up in an atmosphere of thoroughness and discipline, absorbing all the best principles of German life yet entirely lacking that overseriousness which is the Teuton's bugbear.

We became buddies, not without causing concern to our two families, each lot of parents wanting their son to find his bosom friend in the noblest of his kind. I do not think I struck Fritz's parents in that light, and my parents thought that my friend's peremptoriness—the one German thing about him—was not in the best English tradition. But we stuck together: his home was mine, and conversely. Together we saw Bernhardt and all the great players of the day. We saved our pocket money and went abroad for holidays together.

Then came the time when, for his firm, he travelled to South America and would write me wonderful letters about adventures in Buenos Aires and Rosario, where, to impress the wealthy traders, he wore clothes tailored in Albemarle Street and drove about in a carriage and four. And while he was making a great name and profits for his firm I sat in my dingy little Manchester office sticking tickets on to samples of flannelette and awaiting his return six months later. The idea that I could make another friend never occurred to me.

I was best man at his wedding and godfather to his first-born, now the witty film and drama critic for the *Sunday Chronicle*. In an excess of pro-British fervour at the beginning of the First World War Fritz had changed his name to Fred. Well, it is not for me to say anything of Fred's married life, except that he and his adorable partner always seemed to me to live it as Darby and Joan must have lived theirs. For his family there was no sacrifice he would not make. There were times when money was made hand over fist, and it was during these periods that my old friend renewed a foible, that of making on any pretext political speeches of the die-hard, last-ditch variety. Bazaars, sales of work, were all the same to him. I remember an agricultural show at Great Harwood where he used the toast of "The Society" as the pretext for a long and impassioned protest against increased taxation on Indian dhooties.

And then came that dreadful slump in which so many good Manchester businesses went under. But Dehn made a meal of difficulties, and the greater the difficulties the nearer that meal approached a feast. Great banking houses surrendered to his personal integrity, which preceded him into their council chambers. He was a gay and witty man, and never gayer and wittier than



when things were at their worst. He wore, like my brother Edward, without being conscious of wearing, Cyrano's *panache*.

*Whit Monday.* A week to-day this Diary will be fifteen years old.

When I began it I knew that it would not be concerned with politics, because I am not a politician. No war clouds loomed, but I knew also that no diary of mine would ever be a war diary, because I am no soldier ; I am not interested in war except as a means to end tyranny and filth. I knew that it would not mirror the gay London round, because I am not in Society ; yachts and grouse moors bore me. But I did feel that Chance or Fate or perhaps something in my own make-up had enabled me to touch life at more points than falls to the lot of the average journalist. I had worked in a mill and sold millions of yards of dingy, sour-smelling calico. I had been thrown among the best spirits of Cross Street, Manchester, and was then (1887) in daily contact with the best of Fleet Street. I had spent some forty-five years looking at great acting, listening to great music, and being instructed in both by parents of unusual culture, who had made me very nearly as free of the French language as of the English. I had read every word of Balzac and Maupassant and most of Zola. I was about to make acquaintance with my hundredth golf-course, and had exhibited harness ponies at half the horse-shows in Great Britain. I had had a quarter of a century's experience of making a little money go a long way. I was ready for adventure, and at the age of fifty-five was still a young man. I had the power to work fourteen hours a day, week in week out, if necessary without holidays. I had published some twenty books. It occurred to me that the foregoing constituted a plurality of things not to be looked for in the diaries of specialists, and so I set to work. And work it has been. Four hours a day for fifteen years is the equivalent of two and a half years working all round the clock. If the motive has been vanity, so be it. If not vanity but the desire to repay some of the delight the world has given me, so be it too. Anyhow, between now and June 2 the work will be finished. No man at all can be diarising for ever, and we must be satisfied.

*May 27* It is easy to misread what the eminent have written  
*Tuesday.* about Shakespeare's contemporaries. Lamb writes about Webster :

To move a horror skilfully, to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop, and then step in with mortal instruments to take its

last forfeit : this only a Webster can do. Inferior geniuses . . . know not how a soul is to be moved. Their terrors want dignity, their affrightments are without decorum.

Yet nine out of ten critics will quote Lamb as saying that " Webster's terrors, etc." Whereas, of course, the charge is against Webster's inferiors.

" This only a Webster can do." In my view there is one quality in which the author of *The White Devil* exceeds Shakespeare. This is the *deadness* of dead men, which in this play is absolute, probably owing to the fact that the author was the lesser poet. Othello's " If 'twere now to die " bespeaks other-world felicity. Romeo's " Here will I set up my everlasting rest " is full of the drugged enchantment of all death-pacts. Antony's " Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand " connotes the bliss of eternal honeymoons. One feels that if these things can be said about Death, Death cannot be as dusty as the pessimists have tried to make out. That there is a penitential limbo for the Macbeths and Richards, and a poetic one for all hired murderers, all these limbos to start the moment the breath is out of the body. Nobody in Shakespeare, except Mercutio, and he would have meant it as a joke, could have said

I have caught  
An everlasting cold ; I have lost my voice  
Most irrecoverably.

The cutting of this play is always a perilous matter, and the present management has done well to retain that passage in which the murders of Isabella and Camillo are revealed in dumb show to Brachiano by a conjurer, Isabella being made to kiss her husband's portrait, which has been previously poisoned, and Camillo having his neck broken during a vaulting match. This dumb show is exactly in the vein of the dead hand, the Masque of Madmen, and Bosola's coffin, cords, and bell in *The Duchess of Malfi*. One suggests that the attempt to bring Webster by omission into touch with sweet and Shakespearean reason is to diminish him. Probably the best way to enjoy this gloomy dramatist is to put the greater man out of mind and concentrate on the things that are Webster's and Webster's alone. Once in the play and once only Webster comes out of his dimension and trespasses into Shakespeare's. This is when Flamineo says :

I have a strange thing in me, to the which  
I cannot give a name, without it be  
Compassion.

This is the only touch of heartbreak in a play compact of horrors. Bobbie Helpmann said the lines finely to-night. But then his whole

performance was marked by a virtuosity, a virility, and a rare quality of sheer verbal passion. I shall tell the reader whose only interest in criticism is the answer to the question "Shall I enjoy this play?" that the answer is simple. If he gets a pleasurable shudder at lines like

Millions are now in graves, which at last day  
Like mandrakes shall rise shrieking,

he will. If he thinks the Last Trump should sound to the strain of "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'," he won't.

*May 28*      Brother Mycroft sends me a letter he has received from  
*Wednesday.* Stanley Rigby, with whom I went on my first walking tour exactly fifty years ago. What days those were! I remember a broiling Bank Holiday on which, starting from Rosthwaite, the charming hamlet at the head (or is it foot?) of Derwentwater, we conquered Great Gable, Scafell, and Scafell Pike, legging it wearily to Seascale. Wearily because of my camera, the case of which Stanley, dear, unselfish fellow, insisted on carrying, leaving me only the legs. A beautiful 'cellist, and possessed even as a boy of a dry wit, deriving from the same fount as Mr Bennet's. Here is a bit out of his letter to Mycroft:

Snatching a seat in the London-Bournemouth train the other day landed me in an encounter with a sort of Miss Flite. She was a gentle creature with a weak top storey and a passion for asking the most searching personal questions. Where was I going? Was I married? Would my wife be pleased to see me home? Where did I live? Above all, she was interested in my book—I was reading Jimmie. Was I reading for pleasure or for study? I couldn't resist admitting it was the latter. What did *Ego* mean? It meant "himself," I told her; that the writer found it the most interesting subject in the world and expected the rest of us to do the same. I had reached page 164 and she wanted to know whether the picture of Tartuffe was the author. I resisted that one and showed her the frontispiece, which impressed her as *The Soul's Awakening* used to move our young generation. . . .

*May 31*      Letter to Brother Mycroft:  
*Saturday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions  
Grape Street, W.C.2*

DEAR WHISKERS,

I was getting quite nicely through or over or around all the illnesses which end in "-itis," when yesterday I discovered that a humiliating complaint, dropsy,—not to be elegantised by the fact

that Johnson was a great sufferer from and Balzac died of it—had set in. How would you feel if you suddenly discovered that your feet were podgier than Queen Victoria's, and that from what used to be the ankles upwards you were the same size and shape as Daniel Lambert? However, my two doctors—yes, two—tell me there is nothing to worry about, that I must believe them and not use up energy in worrying. So I don't.

I have always had an itch towards philosophy, the riches of old age, and I am not going to throw away those riches when I need them most. I recall Bacon's "For strength of nature in youth passeth over many excesses, which are owing a man till his age." Well, the time has come to pay the debt, and I am not going to grouse about it. Incidentally, it has given me great pleasure to read my two doctors the ending to *Of Regiment of Health*, which fits them perfectly :

"Physicians are some of them so pleasing and conformable to the humour of the patient, as they press not the true cure of the disease; and some other are so regular in proceeding according to art for the disease, as they respect not sufficiently the condition of the patient. Take one of a middle temper; or if it may not be found in one man, combine two of either sort; and forget not to call as well the best acquainted with your body, as the best reputed of for his faculty."

One thing, my dear Whiskers, that irks me is the extraordinary combination of fatigue and insomnia. Owing to the pain all my body cries out for sleep, and I just can't catch it—probably something to do with the asthma. Fortunately, however, my flat faces two ways, so that I put an extremely comfortable, high-backed, well-pillowed chair in the windows of two rooms with different aspects. Both windows have ledges which will take a cushion. I go to what I call bed at eleven o'clock, sit in the dark, and get amusement out of Holborn's cats and other late *noceurs*. Quite frequently, round about four, I put my head on the cushion and drop off for a couple of hours, after which there is the delight of seeing Holborn wake up. To get the best of this entertainment I go into the room which has a view of a lot of little shops, including a tyre-dealer's, and it is fun to watch dust-carts jostling Rolls-Royces for priority. And when the doctor comes in the morning and asks what sort of night I have had, I say, "Splendid!"

I can't read new books because of the fatigue, but I can still quote Micawber in chunks. I don't play the gramophone much, as I find the noise hurts, but I can sit and nurse the records and play them in my head. When friends come round I like them to be more or less silent, while I recall the witty things they have said in the past. I have an immense amount to be thankful for, and never cease marvelling that a contentious and truculent fellow like me can have acquired, without angling for it, so much that gives old age its value. To-day I have had telephone messages from Lilian

Braithwaite and Helen Haye ; Abel of the Ivy sent me a dozen peaches ; Gwen Chenhalls's kindness is not to be believed ; my room is almost as full of flowers as Sarah Bernhardt's *loge* on a first-night. I could have cars here every hour of the day, but the doctors say I am not strong enough to go for drives. So I sit and muse and am thankful that, so far as I can perceive, my intellectual vigour has not abated. It shows itself best in this, I think—the realisation that it is not within the power of present pain to lay a finger on past ecstasy. I thank God that He has made this world more perdurable than any but a poet's view of it—that a thousand poets could fall off a mountain without doing anything except add to its grandeur. What does it matter if my spirits droop a little now and then so long as the butcher-boy can whistle, or how many aches and pains I groan under so long as the cherry blossoms in the Park ?

So don't worry about me. I have had enough happiness and excitement and joy of work to fill ten lifetimes. Don't come up to London to see me ; so long as you stay put I shall feel that " There's sap in't yet."

My best love to yourself, Lizzie, and Mary.

Ever,

JIMMIE

*June 1*            There was a time when I planned to end this Diary  
*Sunday.*        on my seventieth birthday—a project no longer feasible.  
I think I should have finished with something like this :

I thank Thee, God, for all the things life has meant to me. For the seaside and cricket on the sands which made up my childhood. For the golf-courses and show-yards of my youth and middle age. For the books, acting, and music, recollection of which makes my old age rich and enviable. For the stone walls of Derbyshire, the dales of Yorkshire, Welsh mountains, and English lakes. For fun, good talk, and enjoyment of the minds of others. For Brother Edward's wit and courage. For Brother Harry, who has taught me what unselfishness may be. For Leo Pavia. For those great spirits—Montague, Monkhouse, Mair. For the loyalty and devotion of my friends everywhere. For the humble friends and helpers who have made my work possible. For any talent I may have possessed, and the gift of energy to prosecute it. For never having utterly lost the sense of the glory and the freshness of a dream. For never having for one instant believed that there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth. For the power of being two persons.

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will : remember not past years.

*June 2*            On the first page of *Ego* there is a cutting from an evening  
*Monday.*        paper which, first with the news, was overjoyed to tell its  
readers how James Agate, "described as a dramatic  
critic," at some police-court in Essex had been committed to prison

for a debt of twenty pounds. Well, history repeats itself ; or at least mine does. Received this morning a curt communication from the Revenue saying that unless I find £940 within a week everything in my flat except the bed I lie on will be taken away. The fact that since the War, despite reduced income and increased tax, I have paid off some £6000 of arrears appears not to weigh with these gentry, who do not rise above a twopenny bus-ride view of existence. And why should they ? It takes one Balzac to write, and another to comprehend, " La dette est une œuvre d'imagination que les créanciers ne comprennent jamais." It would be absurd to expect tax-collectors to think on these levels. Or on any level. One of these paper-cuffed, inky-fingered gentry said to me the other day, " Mr Agate, with all the money you have made you ought to leave nine rows of houses." I said, " Mr Inspector, with all the money I have spent I am going to leave nine volumes of *Ego*." But it was lost on him, just as the Revenue threat is lost on me. I am not unduly perturbed because in three months' time they are going to demand another £940, plus £300 for Amusement Tax or something. I am just not worrying. Something has always turned up, and something will turn up now. I have lived for so long on the edge of so many precipices that for me *terra firma* has become *terra incognita*. In the meantime I cannot think of a better note on which to end my Diary. " The deadliest deaths are the best," said old Montaigne, and I hold the same about quick endings. So, with a friendly nod to the readers who have kept me company during the last fifteen years, I set about my final sentences. As I pen them I see Brother Edward rubbing his long nose as though wondering how a man who has written so much can have said so little. While over my shoulder comes the voice of Leo, saying, " Tell me, James ; will your *Ego* 9 be Choral ? "

## Footnote to "Ego 9"

by

Alan Dent

James had definitely and finally decided to make this volume the last of the *Ego* series. We therefore have here the strange and, I should think, unprecedented spectacle of a man coming to the virtual conclusion of his autobiographical diary at the moment when Death's hand—without his knowing it—was upon him. He terminated his autobiography even as his life was ending.

The end came suddenly, just before eleven o'clock on the evening of Friday, June the 6th. He had a heart-attack, collapsed, and died beside his bed. I last set eyes on him on the previous Monday evening, when I called to see him and found him sitting up in his study, in some pain and discomfort, yet zealously correcting the early galley proofs of this same volume. He was by no means pessimistic, and did not mention death.

Exactly a fortnight earlier there had been a very remarkable incident in the lives of both of us. Newspapers have to be unsentimental, and to envisage possibilities of the dissolution of any and every celebrity. One of my editors had asked me to prepare an obituary notice of James. In spite of his being so obviously ill, it had never occurred to me that he was going to die in my own lifetime, and I was therefore a shade alarmed at the request. I telephoned him to ask how he was, and he insisted on my breaking a previous appointment and lunching with him. "The Ivy at one, and not a minute later. I have to see a film at two," he said. I was in his favourite restaurant at one o'clock sharp, and sitting at the corner table on the right as one enters. No James! So there and then, alone at the table, and with most of the theatrical celebrities that matter in full view, I took out my tablets, and then and there, and full of the subject, wrote my obituary of James—straight on to the page, as is my wont, modelling each sentence in my mind before committing it to writing.

This article appeared, eventually, in *The Manchester Guardian* on the Monday after James's death. I was setting down the last words of its last sentence—this is plain and simple truth—when he looked round the door and, grey of face but smiling, said, with a flash of his uncanny precipency, "Fifty minutes late, I know, but it takes me a

time to dress. What are you writing there, Jock—*my obituary, I suppose?*” I did not deny the fact, but put my papers away. We ordered food and drink, and when I was beginning my soup he startled me by saying, “Come, boy—as one journalist to another—let me read what you really think of me!” I think anyone in my shoes must have found this an agitating experience—indeed, a distressing one. With his great horror of death he might there and then have had his fatal heart-seizure. He might, at the least, have taken violent exception. I therefore hesitated—but he very firmly insisted. I thereupon gave him the article to read and continued to eat my soup, though with a trembling hand.

Never have I felt so foolishly like James Boswell, and never in his life did James so resemble Dr Johnson. He read the piece through with a kind of beaming solemnity, paused only when he came to the list of his enthusiasms to entreat me—yes, entreat me—to make mention of “golf,” and then handed me back my manuscript with a single observation: “I’m proud, Jock, to have that written about me, and you’ve written it well!” Thereupon he changed the subject, and never again throughout the hurried luncheon—or in the remaining three weeks—made any mention of the following obituary, which I wrote in those circumstances, which he read in those circumstances, and which duly appeared in that great newspaper to which, to our pride, we have both belonged:

“Death hath this also, that it openeth the gate to good fame and extinguisheth envy. *Extinctus amabitur idem.*” (How James would have chuckled over an appreciation that begins with a quotation involving both Bacon and Horace!)’

Now that he is dead, few will deny that he was the leading dramatic critic of our time. He was the chief of our craft, and a warrior chief, and a working chief right up to the end. As a critic he was cogent, never smooth, often belligerent, often capricious too, but always forthright, and sound and consistent in his standards; angrily impatient of the slipshod, the gimcrack, the pretentious, full of words and notions and allusions and audacities, full of sound and fury too, but always signifying something. And he used everything he had to write about or around—even the most trivial and unpromising play, book, film, or essay-topic—as an occasion for spilling the words and ideas with which his large mind so generously overflowed.

For fifteen years, which seemed like five, I served my apprentice-



ship with him in the craft of criticism, and never once in that time did I see him, when well and working, 'dry up' for lack of anything to say. He was extravagant in all ways, and did not pretend to be anything else. He had a large amount of that self-knowledge which the Greeks called ultimate wisdom. He loved praise even more than most of us do, and would let you call him all the things he was—witty, immensely readable, discriminating, irresistible, provocative, Pepysian, Johnsonian, Hazlittian, and even Shavian—till the sun went down (or rose) and the wine-bottle was empty. But if any commentator, or any mere flatterer, praised his writing style the critic in him invariably ousted the inordinate vanity. His prose was lively and prickly, but not that of a great stylist. He knew this and admitted it honestly. He slaved all his life to express himself in a style comparable to that of his lofty models and ideals—Hazlitt, C. E. Montague, and the critic Shaw. He was genuinely satisfied with his writing only when it seemed to him a passable approximation to any one of these.

In his later life he turned to diary-making—writing, naturally, far more loosely than in his criticism—and produced nine big volumes of the celebrated autobiography *Ego*—a kind of huge vat to catch all that overflow of the verbal energy that was in him or which he occasioned in his followers, friends, and enemies. Like Falstaff in more ways than one, he was not only witty in himself, but the direct occasion of wit in his inferiors.

In his person as in his work he could be overbearing, browbeating, blunt, and then "incalculably he could do the nicest things," as some one once phrased it to me in a letter. In my secretarial time I have called him many things to his face—a monster, a ton of saturated self, a "bletherin' blusterin' b'llum" (just to tease and just to be Scots), but he easily forgave and was easy to forgive. He had, beside true and unexpected kindness, a formidable amount of charm (a valuable gift even when one trades on it), was full of delightful surprises, and was never a bore (except about personal health, a subject on which Dr Johnson himself was probably a bore).

In fine, we are mourning a great character, undeniably a great dramatic critic, and possibly a great diarist. Only time can determine his status in the last faculty. How he would have beamed at my triple and considered application of the word 'great'—a word he wisely taught me to use with the most critical discretion!

He was at his consummate best—either writing or talking—on the subject of great acting, and was almost unique in his profession

in having seen some ! The ruling passions of his life were for the stage, for informed and witty conversation, for the language and literature of France, for golf and Hackney ponies, and for all that goes with urbane living. He loved life dearly, and " the vasty hall of death " can seldom have had a more unwilling visitant.

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